

2017 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

THE PLAYOFF 1 Alabama 2 Florida St. 3 Ohio St. 4 Oklahoma St. SI'S TOP 25 Is Your School in?

Sports Illustrated

AUGUST 14-21, 2017
DOUBLE ISSUE
SI.COM | @SINOW

**ALL THE
STOPS**

The Ultimate
Road Trip
Through the
2017 Season

WEEK 6:
**J.T.
BARRETT**
IN COLUMBUS

The Playoffs?
The Buckeyes
Have Been
There Before-
And They're
Going Back

P. 87

Experience Counts

THIS COVER HAS
A SPECIAL AUGMENTED
REALITY EXPERIENCE, PRESENTED BY
HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS®

DOWNLOAD THE **LIFE VR APP**
AND SCAN THE IMAGE WITH THE
AR CAMERA TO ACTIVATE
(LEARN MORE ON P. 16)



PLUS

THE BIG 12'S
SMALL IMPACT

BY ANDY STAPLES

P. 54

IT'S SAM
DARNOLD'S
MOMENT
(AND HIS
HEISMAN TO
LOSE)

BY LEE JENKINS

P. 78

CHEVY. THE ONLY BRAND TO EARN J.D. POWER DEPENDABILITY AWARDS FOR CARS, TRUCKS AND SUVS. TWO YEARS IN A ROW.



ALL-NEW 2016 EQUINOX

2017 CAMARO

2017 SILVERADO HD



Current awards based on 2013 and 2014 model year vehicles.

Over 35,000 owners were asked by J.D. Power to rate the dependability of their vehicles after three years of ownership. The result? Confirmation that when it comes to Chevrolet cars, trucks and SUVs, peace of mind comes standard.

2017 "MOST DEPENDABLE SMALL CAR, LARGE SUV, LARGE HEAVY DUTY PICKUP AND MIDSIZE SPORTY CAR"
2016 "MOST DEPENDABLE MIDSIZE CAR, COMPACT SUV, LARGE HEAVY DUTY PICKUP AND MIDSIZE SPORTY CAR"

The Chevrolet Sonic, Chevrolet Tahoe, Chevrolet Silverado HD and Chevrolet Camaro received the highest numerical scores in their respective segments in the J.D. Power 2017 U.S. Vehicle Dependability Study, based on responses from 35,186 U.S. original owners of 2014 model-year vehicles after three years of ownership about problems experienced in the past 12 months, surveyed in October–December 2016. The Chevrolet Malibu, Chevrolet Equinox, Chevrolet Silverado HD and Chevrolet Camaro received the highest numerical scores in their respective segments in the J.D. Power 2016 U.S. Vehicle Dependability Study, based on responses from 33,560 U.S. original owners of 2013 model-year vehicles after three years of ownership about problems experienced in the past 12 months, surveyed in October–December 2015. Your experiences may vary. Visit jdpower.com.



2017 TAHOE

2017 SONIC

2017 MALIBU



FIND **NEW** ROADS™

CHEVROLET



Your Business Becomes Our Business.™



That's why we make
more eCommerce
deliveries to homes
than anyone
in the country.

Learn more at usps.com/shippingmatters



PRIORITY:YOU

Trademarks are used with permission. Appearance does not constitute a USPS endorsement.
United States Postal Service. All Rights Reserved. The Eagle Logo is among the many trademarks of the U.S. Postal Service.®

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

49

Road Trip

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE BEST OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL

By Joan Niesen

54 Big 12

How the league can become relevant again
By Andy Staples

64 The Tackle

Rethinking one of the game's most elemental plays
By Andy Staples

70 Grad Transfers

The rule has brought NFL-style wrinkles to the FBS
By Joan Niesen

78 Sam Darnold

USC's quarterback and his surprising rise to the top
By Lee Jenkins

87

Scouting Reports

SI's Top 25, with picks for the College Football Playoff

Departments

- 4 SI.com
- 6 Inbox
- 10 Leading Off
- 16 Editors' Letter
- 19 Scorecard
- 30 Faces in the Crowd
- 116 Point After
Steve Rushin:
The soundtrack of sports

SI HAS REGIONAL COVERS THIS WEEK:
Photographs by (clockwise from top left): Kevin D. Liles;
Mario Cantu/CSM/ZUMA Wire; Jamie Sabau/Getty Images; Robert Beck

Features

NFL

34 Game of Throws

Competing to be a team's No. 1 QB makes for some legendary stories By Jonathan Jones

HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL

40 Zion Williamson

His viral dunks have made him better known than any prep star ever By Chris Johnson



+

Fantasy Camp

Summer is slipping away, NFL training camps are hitting their stride and already have a handful of preseason game in the books. You know what that means: It's time to start preparing for another season of fantasy football. Should you draft a running back or a wide receiver like **Julio Jones** [above] with the first pick? How long should you wait before selecting a quarterback? SI.com has all the info you need to be ready on draft day, from the breakout players who could define your season [**Marcus Mariota**, near right] to the rookies who are capable of stepping in on Day One and making a huge impact [**Dalvin Cook**, far right]. For all of your fantasy needs throughout the 2017 preseason, including team-by-team previews and full player rankings, go to SI.com/fantasy



Grand Premier

The English Premier League kicks off its 25th season on Friday. Jonathan Wilson takes a look back at the EPL's history—and ahead to its future. How did it become the most popular sports league in the world, and where can it go from here? As for this season, only a handful of teams

are expected to be genuine title contenders, headlined by Manchester United and Manchester City; the rivalry between the crosstown enemies' respective managers, **José Mourinho** [far left] and **Pep Guardiola**, will shape the EPL race. For predictions, club rankings and everything you need to get ready for the upcoming season, check out SI.com/planet-futbol

iPhone 7 on Cricket Wireless. A game changer and a game winner.



iPhone 7

At Cricket Wireless, you can get iPhone 7 with an easy-to-love plan that starts at just \$30 per month. Plus, you don't have to worry about any annual contracts.

Stop by a Cricket Wireless store today or visit cricketwireless.com/iphone.

Activ./upgrade (up to \$25/line) & add'l one-time fees (including up to a \$3 Customer Assistance Fee) & restr's may apply. Terms, features and restr's subject to change w/o notice. 4G LTE coverage not avail. everywhere. See store for details. © 2017 Cricket Wireless LLC. All rights reserved.



cricket
wireless

INBOX

FOR JULY 24-31, 2017

Perhaps to complement the Fashionable 50, you could name a Generous 10 and highlight athletes who set a positive example to our youth. After all, there is more to life than looking good.

Stephen P. Havera, Lewistown, Ill.

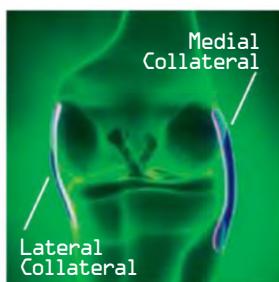
How could you overlook Warriors guard Nick (Swaggy P) Young, who has his own nonathletic clothing line? That's an epic fashion fail.

Dan Forer, Los Angeles



Though the text of the article about **ACL tears** was great, the accompanying diagram was incorrect (SCORECARD). The lateral collateral ligament runs along the outside of the knee; since the picture showed a right knee, the LCL would be on the left (as below). The medial would be on the right.

Brad Brainard, Tucson



Letters E-mail SI at letters@SI.timeinc.com or fax SI at 212-467-2417. Letters should include the writer's full name, address and home telephone number and may be edited for clarity and space. **Customer Service and Subscriptions** For 24/7 service, go to SI.com/customerservice. Call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 62120, Tampa, FL 33662. To purchase reprints of SI covers, go to SICovers.com. **Advertising** For ad rates, an editorial calendar or a media kit, email SI at SIpubqueries@timeinc.com.

CONTACT
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Retire with Passions.

Retire with Money newsletter

SIGN UP TODAY! MONEY.COM/NEWSLETTER

© 2017 Time Inc. MONEY is a trademark of Time Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.



Kudos to Tim Layden for a great trip down memory lane. Each paragraph brought to life intriguing matchups and comparisons of players, old school and new. I finished it wishing for more.

Bob Locke, Glendale, Ariz.

I was very happy for former Colts GM Ernie Accorsi, who, 34 years after drafting John Elway only to be forced to trade him, finally got his man.

Tony McCoy, St. Petersburg

I very much enjoyed Michael Rosenberg's piece on umpire **Joe West** (*The Last Cowboy*) and have now changed my opinion of the man. West seems to know what he wants in life and isn't afraid to get busy achieving it. I only wish he didn't want to be the star of the game so often.

Mike Coyne
Wake Forest,
N.C.



The week that **Roger Federer**, the greatest men's tennis player of all time, wins his eighth Wimbledon title and 19th Grand Slam at age 35 (*Eighth Wonder*), SI elects to feature **Russell Westbrook**, fashion icon, on its cover. Surely this is a **Sign of the Apocalypse**.

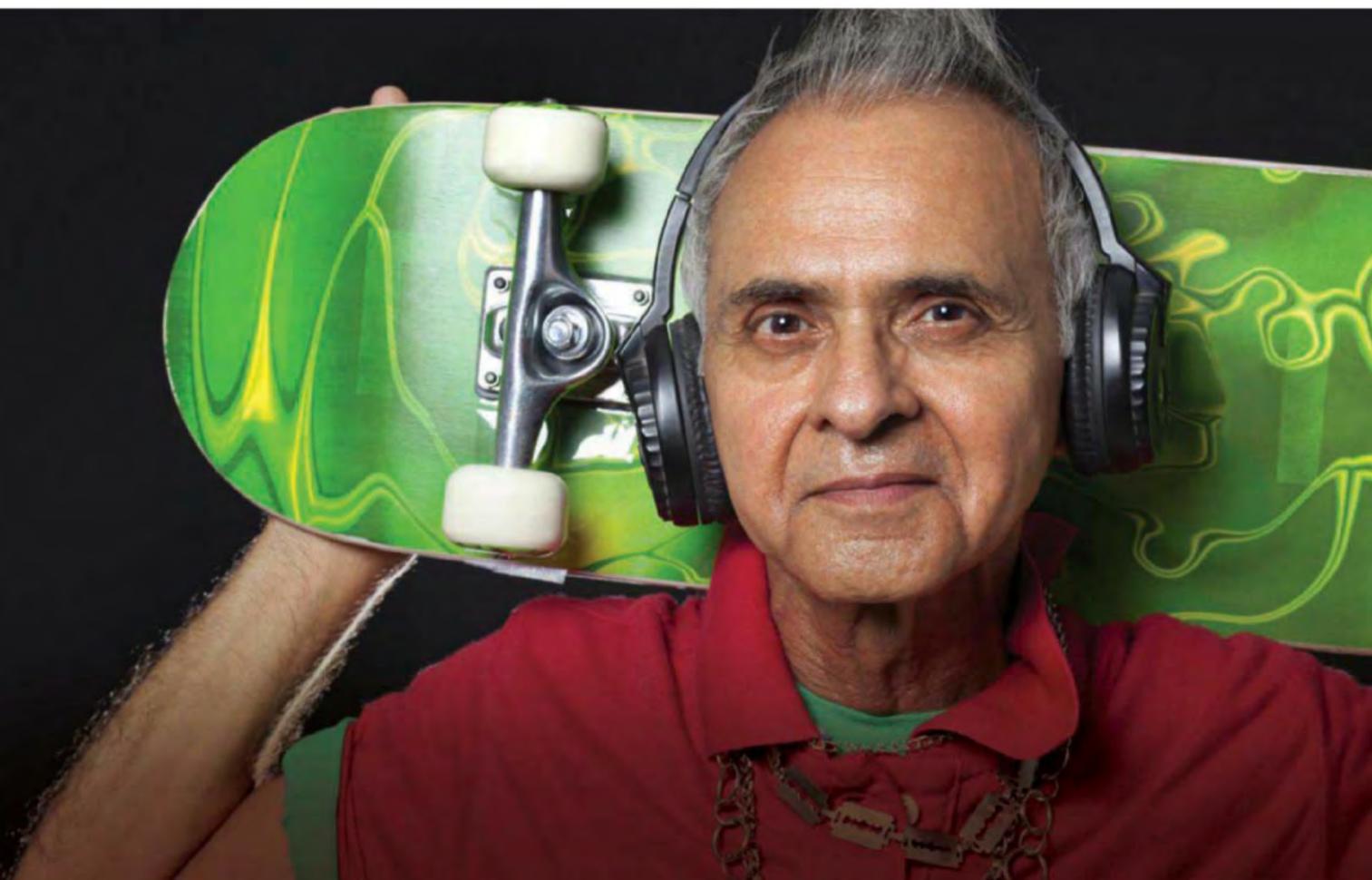
Craig Voegele, Olympia, Wash.

PAGE
16

SCORECARD

Thank you for Charles P. Pierce's piece about hype surrounding the **Floyd Mayweather-Conor McGregor** fight. As a public school teacher I know many young people look up to professional athletes. When they spew hateful rhetoric, it sends the message that such behavior is acceptable and potentially even lucrative.

Joshua Keels, San Francisco



Honda **Summerbration**

SALES EVENT



2017 Accord
Touring Sedan

0.9%
APR[†]

On All New 2017 Accord and Select Civic Models
(for well-qualified buyers)

Beat the heat with a cool deal on Kelley Blue Book's Best Value Brand.*



2017 Civic
Touring Sedan



*2017 Kelley Blue Book Brand Image Awards are based on the Brand Watch™ study from Kelley Blue Book Strategic Insights. Award calculated among non-luxury shoppers. For more information, visit www.kbb.com. Kelley Blue Book is a registered trademark of Kelley Blue Book Co., Inc. [†]Subject to availability through 9/5/17 on approved credit through Honda Financial Services, 0.9% APR for 24-60 months on new and unregistered 2017 Honda Accord and Honda Civic models for well-qualified buyers. Excludes all Hatchback models and Civic Si. Not all buyers will qualify. Higher financing rates apply for buyers with lower credit ratings. Example for 2017 Accord Touring Sedan (per \$1,000 financed and for 0.9% APR): 24 months financing at \$42.06/month or 60 months financing at \$17.05/month. Dealer sets actual prices. See participating dealers for details. ©2017 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

HONDA
ShopHonda.com



IAAF World

championships LONDON 2017

SEIKO



Blue by Bolt

Since the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, when he took gold in the 100- and 200-meters, Usain Bolt had won 12 of 13 finals in nonrelay races. The only loss was in the 100 at the '11 world championships in South Korea, but he hadn't been beaten—he was disqualified for a false start. The first time he was outrun was last Saturday at the World Championships in London. The final individual race of the 30-year-old Bolt's incomparable career (page 22) was won by Justin Gatlin of the U.S. (far left), 35, the '04 Olympic champion. Gatlin, who served a four-year drug suspension from '06 to '10, finished in 9.92 seconds, followed by 21-year-old countryman Christian Coleman (second from right) and Bolt (near left).







2
of
3

Leading
Off

@sportsillustrated



Tower Power

The men's marathon at worlds started and ended at Tower Bridge (left). The race began with 100 competitors streaking past the Tower of London, but by mile 14 two had broken from the pack: Geoffrey Kirui of Kenya and Tamirat Tola of Ethiopia. With five miles to go, Kirui left Tola behind, winning in 2:08:27, 82 seconds ahead of Tola and 84 ahead of Alphonse Simbu of Tanzania. Elkanah Kibet was the top U.S. finisher, at 16th. In the women's race, Rose Chelimo of Burundi took gold, but Amy Cragg, 33, who was born in Long Beach, Calif., went to high school in Kansas, ran track at Arizona State and now lives in Portland, finished third, the first U.S. woman to win a marathon medal at worlds since Marianne Dickerson took silver in 1983.



PHOTOGRAPH BY
BOB MARTIN



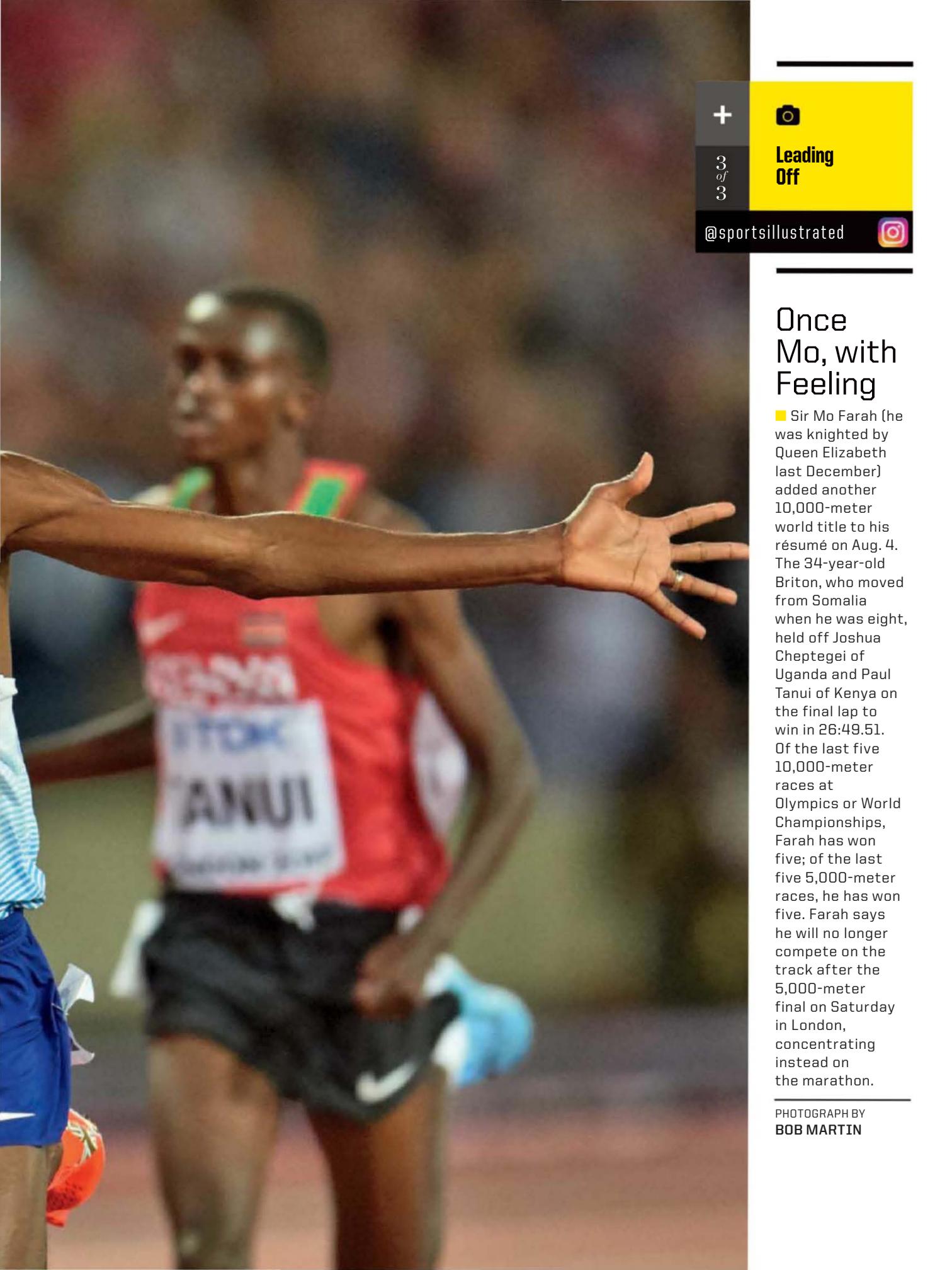
GREAT BRITAIN

TDK

FARAH

LONDON 2017





+

3
of
3



Leading
Off

@sportsillustrated



Once Mo, with Feeling

■ Sir Mo Farah (he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth last December) added another 10,000-meter world title to his résumé on Aug. 4. The 34-year-old Briton, who moved from Somalia when he was eight, held off Joshua Cheptegei of Uganda and Paul Tanui of Kenya on the final lap to win in 26:49.51. Of the last five 10,000-meter races at Olympics or World Championships, Farah has won five; of the last five 5,000-meter races, he has won five. Farah says he will no longer compete on the track after the 5,000-meter final on Saturday in London, concentrating instead on the marathon.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
BOB MARTIN

Prep Rally

→ BY THE EDITORS OF SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

→ **Dabo Swinney** last month, on chatter about Clemson's chances of defending its national championship: "None of that really matters. What matters is what we think and how we prepare."

Jim Harbaugh a few weeks ago, on his summer plans: "I'm avoiding all fun stuff. Concentrating on preparing ourselves for the season."

Nick Saban . . . well, always: "No matter what your chosen profession, be prepared for opportunity."

See a pattern? Leaders in all sports love to extol the virtues of preparation, but college football coaches are the true masters of the art. (Saban also gets a hat tip for introducing a new koan at SEC Media Day, as he seized on the Process-ready value in Bama's title-game loss last January: "Hopefully, we won't waste a failure.") The goal of SI's annual college football preview is similar. We want to do for you, the fan, what those guys do for their teams—get you as prepared as possible for the joy, sadness and madness of the season ahead. And we can do it without two-a-days.

This year's preview, expertly conceived and overseen by senior editor Jim Gorant, takes on that task in ways that are traditional and cutting-edge. Senior writer Lee Jenkins profiles USC's Sam Darnold,

who checks off every trait for the Big Time Quarterback: huge arm, winner's pedigree, surfer-dude cool—and great hair (page 78). Senior writer Andy Staples examines how the most elemental act in football—the tackle—is evolving in an era of rampant spread offenses and increased head-injury awareness (page 64). Staples also dives deep into the troubles facing one of the sport's most hallowed conferences, the Big 12, which has been losing relevance in both the College Football Playoff conversation and in the NFL draft (page 54). We also have team-by-team previews of SI's Top 25, from Saban's Crimson Tide at No. 1 to Texas A&M at 25. Spoiler: No. 4 Oklahoma State could improve things for the Big 12.

Features like those are the fundamentals of preseason prep. This year we're adding a few wrinkles, too. Staff writer Joan Niesen looks at an obscure NCAA rule—the grad-transfer option (page 70)—that is suddenly having a seismic impact on the college football landscape. (Your coach hates this free agency approximation . . . until he uses it to find a quarterback.) Even more futuristic: The cover is enabled for a special augmented reality experience, presented by Holiday Inn Express®. Download the LifeVR app, use its AR camera

to scan the cover, and a video that sets the table for the 2017 season will play on your phone.

Speaking of setting the table: We've imagined this preview as a road trip through the season—spotlighting not only key games but also the towns and attractions that make college football about so much more than football. Food, of course, is huge. Sprinkled through the issue, you'll find Staples's recommendations for some of the tastiest—and scariest—dining options in the country, part of the Top 25 College Town Meals he's assembled for our new digital food vertical, SI Eats. (The full list is at SI.com/eats.)

So what does our lead college football writer and resident road eats expert do to get geared up for the season? "I study depth charts, schedules and

college town menus," Staples says. "Every so often I'll mix 'Rocky Top' or 'The Victors' or 'Fight On' into the workout playlist. And if I really want to get fired up, I pull up the greatest calls of Keith Jackson or Larry Munson on YouTube. I still have no idea what a hobnail boot is, but I know I get pumped when I hear Larry yell about it."

That's the essence of college football: We can't always explain it, but we love it. Consider yourself prepared. □



College football 2017: Darnold, Saban and the Pulled Pork Mac and Cheese at the Village Idiot in Lexington, Ky.

WHEN YOU NAME YOUR DOG AFTER
YOUR TEAM'S COACH AND YOUR
FIRSTBORN AFTER YOUR QUARTERBACK...
**YOU AREN'T *READY* FOR
COLLEGE FOOTBALL.**
**YOU ARE THE
READIEST.**



AN IHG® HOTEL

PROUD SPONSOR OF THE



STAY SMART. **BE THE READIEST.™**
SAVE UP TO 15%* WHEN YOU BOOK EARLY AT HOLIDAYINNEXPRESS.COM.

*Terms apply

CHEVY SILVERADO VS. FORD F-150.

	SILVERADO	F-150
ROLL-FORMED, HIGH-STRENGTH STEEL BED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CORNERSTEP REAR BUMPER	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
AUTOMATIC LOCKING REAR DIFFERENTIAL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BLUE LOGO	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
MOST DEPENDABLE, LONGEST-LASTING FULL-SIZE PICKUPS ON THE ROAD ¹	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



SILVERADO

FIND **NEW** ROADS[®]

CHEVROLET



¹ Dependability based on longevity: 1987–July 2016 full-size pickup registrations.

Track
Life After Bolt

22

Extra
Mustard

24

The Moment
2016 PGA

26

Pets
Dog Days

28

Faces in
The Crowd

30

Vault
Death of a Goon

32

Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH + SARAH KWAK

SCORECARD



Strong Argument
John Cena, who has crossed over into the movies, is one of WWE's mainstream stars.

Slam Bunk

Yeah, we know it's not real, and by acknowledging it, pro wrestling is adding fans and gaining respect

BY DAN GREENE

A WARNING for uninitiated social media trawlers: Aug. 20 is WWE's SummerSlam, on pay-per-view. If this seems irrelevant to you, perhaps you can relate to this scenario instead: You're spending yet another evening on Twitter, scrolling away your ennui, when the accounts you follow for sports and news suddenly start posting about superplexes. Soon you realize this is a full-scale invasion of the bodyslammers. You are left scratching your head. Why, you wonder, is my timeline suddenly filled with . . . wrestling?

This is not a phenomenon specific to the Twitterverse. In recent years pro wrestling discussion has steadily seeped into mainstream media in unexpected ways, with surprising staying power. SI.com now runs weekly wrestling features and interviews while regularly spotlighting viral-worthy in-ring moments. Last August, ESPN.com launched a WWE-focused vertical, almost a year after it began devoting weekly *SportsCenter* segments to interviews with wrestlers. Other outlets, including *The New York Times*, are giving more frequent space to the subject as well. Stars like John Cena have gone Hollywood. Suddenly pro

wrestling—the scripted pseudo-sport long dismissed by virtually everyone but its fans—is seemingly everywhere. What gives?

Even as one of those timeline-flooders, I agree it's a fair question. After all, this is not necessarily one of the industry's cyclical boom periods, when its product aligns with the zeitgeist (the gaudy gloss of the 1980s, the irreverence of the late '90s) to catalyze crossover appeal. While WWE is financially strong and gleefully touts its social media following—it has 9.34 million Twitter followers, more than either Major League Baseball or the NHL—traditional metrics are in decline. Last

sports (such as SI) or entertainment (such as SI's sister publication, ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY). Millions watched, but hardly anyone else noticed.

But with the Web's insatiable thirst for clicks, outlets discovered a well awaiting a tap. Wrestling pieces draw consistent, low-cost traffic as underserved devotees flock to the newfound substance available on the topic. It helps that those who came of age while wrestling experienced previous surges in popularity have grown into positions of editorial influence: A 12-year-old who watched Hulk Hogan

Even on bad nights *Raw* typically draws **three million viewers, making it one of the most watched shows on cable.**

Memorial Day its flagship show, USA Network's *Monday Night Raw*, drew the second-lowest Nielsen rating in its 24-year history, with a 1.75; in 1999, for example, that number regularly topped 6.0.

Still, even on bad nights, *Raw* typically draws nearly three million viewers, making it one of the most-watched shows on cable. (For comparison, NBA telecasts on TNT averaged 1.5 million in 2016–17.) Yet “sports entertainment”—WWE's self-styled branding—traditionally found itself without a natural media home, outside the purview of media covering either

slam Andre the Giant at WrestleMania III in 1987 is now 42, while a 16-year-old who idolized the beer-swilling Stone Cold Steve Austin a decade later is now in his or her mid-30s. And with the rise of social media, it is easier (and more socially acceptable) than ever for those who once congregated on obscure message boards to announce their fanaticism in front of everyone, including those who gauge the appetites of the public.

It helps too that the industry has long since dropped the pretense of kayfabe—the internal insistence that the show is nonfiction. Coverage is

in turn no longer dogged by questions of legitimacy, nor is fandom as ridiculed by *you-know-it's-fake-right?* snark. That allows the kind of open appreciation of the form depicted in Netflix's acclaimed new series *GLOW*, or a recent *New York Times* short documentary titled “The Aria of Babyface Cauliflower Brown,” in which an indie wrestler by that name articulates a convincing argument for wrestling as performance art. Wrestling is now a show that lets the world know it's a show.

This is not to say its cultural incursion is all good news. In May, *The New York Times Magazine* ran an essay titled “Is Everything Wrestling?” that examined American society's growing resemblance to the form: politicians' and cable TV hosts' embrace of base conflict, the contrived unreality of celebrity gossip, the pervasive “insistence on telling a great story with no regard for the facts.”

More recently, basketball's proudest and loudest father, LaVar Ball, reportedly admitted to Lakers president of basketball operations Magic Johnson that his public hubris was an act to build his family brand, reminiscent of how WWE honcho Vince McMahon's on-screen antagonism helped earn his company millions. All of which calls to mind a plea paraphrased from one of wrestling's perpetually hapless referees: Please, everybody, let's keep the performance in the ring. □

GO FIGURE



43

Wins in their past 50 games, through Sunday, for the Dodgers. The last team to have a similar stretch was the 1912 New York Giants. Los Angeles, which swept the Mets at Citi Field last weekend, is on pace to win 115 games, which would be the third-highest total ever.

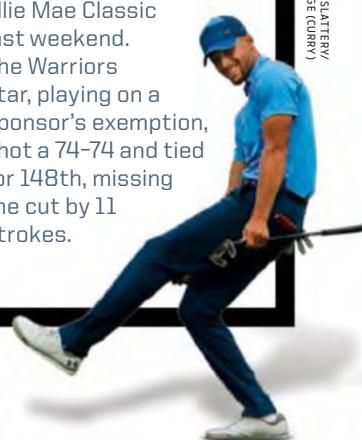
1:59.24

Time for U.S. swimmer Ryan Lochte in the 200-meter IM at the U.S. Open on Sunday, his first event since serving a 10-month suspension for fabricating a robbery during the Rio Olympics. Lochte broke Michael Phelps's 11-year-old meet record by 0.02.

4

Golfers, three pro and one amateur, who scored worse than Steph Curry in the Web.com Tour's Ellie Mae Classic last weekend. The Warriors star, playing on a sponsor's exemption, shot a 74-74 and tied for 148th, missing the cut by 11 strokes.

ALEX TRAIT/WIIGAMB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES (DARISH); RICHARD T. SLATTERY/NEWSDAY/AP (LOCHTE); LACHLAN CUNNINGHAM/GETTY IMAGE (CURRY)



FAST PAIN RELIEF IS NOW MIGHTY SMALL

OUR FIRST CONCENTRATED PILL
WORKS AT LIQUID SPEED.



Use as directed.

© Pfizer 2017

TRACK

Reign Over

The Bolt reprieve comes to a close

ON SATURDAY, a week after capturing bronze in the 100 meters at the World Championships in London (his first defeat in a major race since 2007), Usain Bolt will run the 4×100-meter relay for Jamaica. And then, as he has repeatedly said, he will be gone.

Probably. Let's get this out of the way up front: There is a smirking assumption that Bolt will one day return. And maybe he will. But consider: He has run the 100 faster than 9.80 seconds just twice since the 2012 Olympics. And after being beaten by Justin Gatlin and Christian Coleman of the U.S., the myth of the untouchable Bolt is now debunked.

So let's assume this is the end. In sports, where



we are accustomed to saying goodbye, we are insulated from sadness by the security of knowing that greatness often replaces itself. Bird and Magic left, Jordan came along, Jordan left, LeBron arrived.

But there is no replacing Usain Bolt. He has been the rare athlete who seems both transcendent and accessible, and he has made it all look fun (it has been) and easy (it hasn't been).

Consider the state of track and field before Bolt went viral in Beijing nine years ago. In 2006, Gatlin, the newly minted world-

CLOSING TIME

In his final individual race at the World Championships in London, Bolt was finally beaten in the 100 meters.

record holder, was nailed for a positive PED test and slapped with an eight-year ban (eventually reduced to four years). It was Bolt who made everyone forget about the doping scandals that constantly surround the sport, and he has been performing this duty for a decade.

For every problem posed, Bolt had been the answer. He was track's safe space. When

he ran, there was almost exclusively elation. His departure leaves only more room for the negative, a stark truth evident in Gatlin's icy reception in London.

Yes, there are some in track who believe that Bolt isn't clean. But most choose not to question him. And not just because they want his performances to be real. He's a very tall man with the stride frequency of a smaller man, a combination that just might enable a person to run 100 meters in 9.58 seconds.

The logical choice to replace Bolt is Wayde van Niekerk of South Africa, whose world record 43.03 in the 400 meters in Rio was one of the most remarkable footraces ever run. He is stunningly gifted and could become the first man to run one lap in under 43 seconds. But to be the next Bolt, you need Bolt's style, and the truth is, nobody has that. For a decade he has been one of a kind, and he will remain one of a kind. His presence gave track and field a 10-year reprieve, and now that's over. —Tim Layden



Don Baylor
1949-2017

An MLB pioneer who once volunteered to desegregate O. Henry Junior High in Austin as a seventh-grader, Baylor went on to have a 19-year playing career, during which he was named AL MVP in 1979, and he retired as the leader in home runs by a DH [215]. In 1993, Baylor became the first manager of the Colorado Rockies, winning NL Manager of the Year in '95. He died on Monday at 68 of multiple myeloma. —Ted Keith



Darren Daulton
1962-2017

Daulton survived a serious car crash with teammate Lenny Dykstra in 1991, two years before helping Philadelphia reach the World Series. Beloved by his Phillies teammates, one of whom called him the Godfather, Daulton made three All-Star teams in Philadelphia and won a ring with the Marlins in '97, his last season. After a four-year battle with brain cancer, he died on Sunday at age 55. —T.K.



Ara Parseghian
1923-2017

To movie lovers, Parseghian is the coach who gave Rudy Ruettiger a chance on the Notre Dame scout team. To football fans he was the man who restored the Irish to prominence. In 11 seasons as coach, Parseghian led Notre Dame to two national championships, in 1966 and '73. After retiring in '74, he focused on raising money for Niemann-Pick Type C disease, which had killed three of his grandchildren. He died last week at 94. —Jeremy Fuchs

TRIBUTES



**NEW STYLES
AND GREAT FITS**

Wrangler®

Total Eclipse of the Park

ON AUG. 21 the entire continental U.S. will witness a rare solar eclipse, and those in the 70-mile-wide “path of totality” will enjoy the even rarer sight of the moon fully blocking out the sun for about 2½ minutes. If you’re looking for a place to watch the nation’s first total eclipse in 99 years, a handful of minor league ballparks—from Salem, Ore., to Charleston, S.C.—have got you covered.



THEY
SAID IT

**“I’M PRETTY HIGH
IN MY MIND, SO
I DON’T CARE.”**

Diana Taurasi // Phoenix Mercury guard and the WNBA's all-time leading scorer, when asked what her rating should be when the league's players are included in *NBA Live* for the first time.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Dave Bliss, the former Baylor hoops coach who in 2003 smeared the name of a murdered player to allegedly cover up NCAA rules violations, has been hired to coach a Christian high school team in Las Vegas.

Jay Cutler
Bears fans said he couldn't hit the ocean with a pass. In Miami it'll be easy.



HOT 
NOT 



Guiseppe Ippolito
The bodybuilder tested positive for 14 banned substances after a recent contest. That's not the record, but he gave it a shot.





Life gets plain if you don't add flavor.

Life's tasty. Crunch on.



MAJORS MOMENT: AMPLIFIED

Finishing Rush

Reliving the high drama on Baltusrol's 18th

IT'S FUNNY

what sensory experiences return you to a particular moment. When I think of Jimmy Walker's victory at the 2016 PGA Championship, I smell beer. I was on the edge of the 18th fairway at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J., rushing to match Walker's loping stride, when a fan reached out with a cup of brew and

draw on your experience. I focused on controlling what I could control."

Moments earlier Jason Day had sent shock waves through the tournament, stuffing his second shot on the par-5 closing hole to 10 feet and giving himself a chance to pull within one stroke of Walker. Baltusrol shook. "The challenge of a moment like that," says Day, "is you hit a great shot,



Confidence Game

Facing a tough pitch on the last hole, Walker trusted in himself.

accidentally doused my shirt with an overpriced domestic. I smelled like a frat party while typing my story. Walker himself has other memories of that momentous stroll. "I hit a pretty good drive," he says, "and, walking to the ball, I could feel my heart racing a little bit, could feel my palms getting a little sweaty, my breath getting a little short. In a moment like that, you

and the whole place goes crazy, and you're pumping all this adrenaline, and then you have to very quickly settle yourself."

Day's swing is controlled violence, but for him, putting is about reaching a state of calm. After surveying his putt, he closed his eyes and visualized the ball tracking and disappearing into the hole. "I want the feeling of making the putt in my body

before I attempt it," he says.

And how does it feel when a do-or-die eagle putt actually falls? "All the hairs on my arms and the back of my neck stood right up," Day says.

So now the situation for Walker was this: Make the most important par of his life to win his first major. In a funny way Day's eagle helped Walker because it gave him no wiggle room. "I didn't get to relax," he says.

Standing in the fairway, Walker had to decide whether to lay up or go for the green. "I didn't say this, but I figured, 19 times out of 20, you're going to make a five going for the green from right there," he says.

It was the aggressive approach, but an errant 3-wood left him in the rough right of the green, facing a tough pitch over a bunker. The scene around the hole was chaotic, but Walker radiated confidence, by design. Speaking to reporters afterward, he said, "I'm glad you guys think I looked calm. Because that's what I was going for. I felt confident in myself, in my golf swing, my putting. I tried to wrap myself around that—to trust what I was doing."

Walker hit a smart third shot safely onto the green and ultimately faced a three-foot knee-knocker for the win. "I just buried it," he says. "Felt awesome."

His wife, Erin, and two young sons ran onto the green to celebrate. Erin did not play it quite as cool as her husband. "I can't feel my legs!" she said through the tears. —Alan Shipnuck

FIVE TO EYE

Names to watch at this week's PGA Championship



Jordan Spieth

Tee to green he is better than ever; if his putter gets hot, he could become the youngest to complete the career Grand Slam, at age 24.



Rory McIlroy

In a year of change—new clubs, new caddie, new wife—he has been middling. But he's won twice at Quail Hollow.



Hideki Matsuyama

His brand of macho ball striking is perfect for the big, brawny host course. He's ready, with four straight Top 20 finishes in majors.



Dustin Johnson

Unbeatable in March, he's been a nonfactor since, finishing 54th at Birkdale. One last chance for DJ to make the year meaningful.



Rickie Fowler

Having his heart broken at Augusta and at Erin Hills should steel him for another run at that elusive first major. Right?

STRONG



COFFEE



REVV® is strong coffee. Like, really strong. Boom-goes-the-dynamite strong. In other words, it's just what you need. So drop one in your Keurig® brewer and blow your mid-day blues to smithereens.

FOR YOUR KEURIG® BREWER
KEURIG®

THINK YOU CAN
HANDLE IT?

FIND OUT AT REVVCOFFEE.COM/SI

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

+
Handsome
Is . . .

Yale's brightest star

FOR A DECADE

they faltered, disintegrating whenever the men in crimson arrived. They fumbled and bumbled through standard plays. There was embarrassment. There was exasperation. There were calls for renewed effort and attention. For whatever reason, the Yale football team simply couldn't beat Harvard.

Nine consecutive games from 2007 through '15 brought nine consecutive losses, each more frustrating than the last (although the 45-7 shellacking on Nov. 19, 2011, was particularly humiliating). Then, last fall, the solution arrived. It was neither a behemoth defensive lineman nor a reincarnation of Yale's most legendary football figure, Walter Camp.

No, the difference maker when Yale beat Harvard 21-14 last Nov. 19 was



an eight-week-old, eight-pound Old English bulldog who'd been named for Camp: Walter. "We like to joke that he had some part in that," says Kevin Discepolo, a former Yale lacrosse player who's now an assistant athletic director at the school.

No one knows Discepolo's dog as Walter, though. To his thousands of fans, and to the Yale history books, he will forever be known as Handsome Dan XVIII, the newest manifestation of the Ivy League's best-known canine. Handsome Dan's ancestry dates back to 1889, when a Yale student purchased a bulldog for five dollars and began parading

the pooch across the football field before games, thus introducing America's first live animal mascot.

Dan's duties have grown since then. He now attends every Yale team's games, visits hospitals and appears at fund-raisers. He even led commencement for the class of 2017, strutting through campus alongside the president of the university.

One previous Handsome Dan was featured on the Nov. 5, 1956, cover of SI, and Walter's predecessor, Sherman (named for Founding Father and first New Haven mayor Roger Sherman), was photographed with presidents Jimmy Carter

BOOLA BULLDOG

Walter's arrival broke Yale football's nine-year losing streak to Harvard. (O.K., the players helped too.)

and George H.W. Bush, as well as with Sir Paul McCartney. Sherman passed away last August, and after a period of mourning, the university identified Walter as his successor and designated Discepolo as his handler. Walter arrived a day before the Harvard game and was so small, "he fit right in my hand," Discepolo says.

Although he's been on the job for almost nine months, Walter's first home football game—considered something of an official debut—won't come until Yale hosts Cornell on Sept. 23. That, coincidentally, is also Walter's first birthday.

Until then he'll accompany Discepolo to campus each morning, taking walks, making appearances and eagerly awaiting his big introduction. How would anyone know he's looking forward to walking on the field? All he does is drool.

—Brendan Marks



DAWG DAYS

The bulldog is the face of 39 colleges around the country, making it the third-most-common mascot, behind the eagle (74) and the tiger (46). One of the most notable is Uga, Georgia's white English bulldog, who wears a spiked collar and a red jersey. The original Uga came on

the scene in 1956, and his nine successors have all descended from the same line—and are all buried in marble vaults near the main gate of Sanford Stadium. The reigning Uga spends game days on the field, in an air-conditioned doghouse located next to the (human) cheerleaders. —Jim Gorant



Do you speak dog?

Best friends always stay in touch



ACTIVITY
TRACKING

ADVANCED
GPS

- FITS ANY
STANDARD
COLLAR

- SOUND FOR
TRAINING

- REMOTE
LIGHT

For the first time, you're able to truly stay connected to your dog no matter where you go or how far away they may roam.

Visit LINKAKC.COM for a limited time launch offer.

©2017 LINK AKC. All rights reserved.





CLOSE TO HOME

Bader Up

Of the dozens of major leaguers who've made their debuts this season, one in particular caught our eye: Harrison Bader, a 23-year-old outfielder for the Cardinals. Bader, from Bronxville, N.Y., is the son of Janice Baio Bader, who worked at SPORTS ILLUSTRATED for 15 years as an ad-sales representative. Making his Busch Stadium debut on July 25 against the Rockies, Harrison got his first hit, a leadoff double in the ninth inning and scored the game's winning run. TV cameras caught his family's overjoyed reaction, which mimicked Bader's own. After hitting .286 in six games, he was sent back to the minors on July 31, but Bader is expected to return to St. Louis before season's end.

—Ted Keith



Symone Mason | Miami | Track and Field

Symone, a recent graduate of Southridge Senior High, swept the 100 (11.70), 200 (23.48) and 400 meters (52.69) at the state championships in May, leading the Spartans to the Class 4A title. A month later she ran the 100 in 11.27 to set a meet record at the New Balance nationals. Symone will compete at Miami.



Matt Klotz | Cameron Park, Calif. | Swimming

Klotz, a rising sophomore at LSU, broke the deaf world record in the 50-meter backstroke at the 2017 Deaflympics in Samsun, Turkey, last month, finishing in 26.26. He also set records at the '13 Deaflympics in the 100 (58.69) and 200 (2:07.43) backstrokes. Klotz, who was born deaf, has LSU's ninth-fastest time (48.07) in the 100-yard back.



Keely Rochard | Williamsburg, Va. | Softball

Keely, a recent graduate of Warhill High, struck out 16 batters in an 18-inning, 1-0 victory over Brookville to lead the Lions to their second straight 3A state title. The righthander went 26-0 this season with 19 shutouts while batting .333; she did not allow a run in 13 playoff starts over the past two years. Keely will pitch at Virginia Tech.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by JEREMY FUCHS



Jack Badini | Old Greenwich, Conn. | Hockey

Jack, a forward, led all playoff scorers with 17 points, including seven goals, as he helped the USHL's Chicago Steel win their first Clark Cup. He had an assist in the 3-2 clincher over Sioux City after scoring a team-high 28 goals and 42 points during the regular season. A third-round draft pick of the Ducks, Jack will play at Harvard.



Emily Kemp | Tampa | Flag Football

Emily, a rising sophomore wide receiver at Robinson High, had a 15-yard touchdown catch to help lift the Knights to a 28-6 victory over Miami Edison for the 1A state title. The TD was her 33rd of the season to set a FHSAA record. Emily caught 78 passes and set a school mark with 1,182 receiving yards. She was also named first-team all-state.



Reed Brown | Southlake, Texas | Track and Field

Reed, a recent graduate of Southlake Carroll, ran the mile in 3:59.30 at the St. Louis Festival of Miles in June, the fourth-best time ever for a high school runner. In May he won his second consecutive 6A state title in the 3,200 meters (8:58.02). Reed, the younger brother of former NFL kicker Kris, will compete at Oregon.

Nominate Now ▾

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, email faces@simail.com
For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow [@SI_Faces](#) on Twitter.

Emergen-C

SPARK THE
ENERGY
WITHIN YOU



NEW EMERGEN-C ENERGY+

- + Natural caffeine from green tea to focus your mind.*
- + 7 B vitamins to replenish your body.*
- + Vitamin C to fortify you.*
- + Energy the way you want it.**

EMERGE AND SEE

©2017 Alacer. Emergen-C® Energy+ is a dietary supplement. **Take 1-2 packets at a time.

*These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

SI VAULT

+

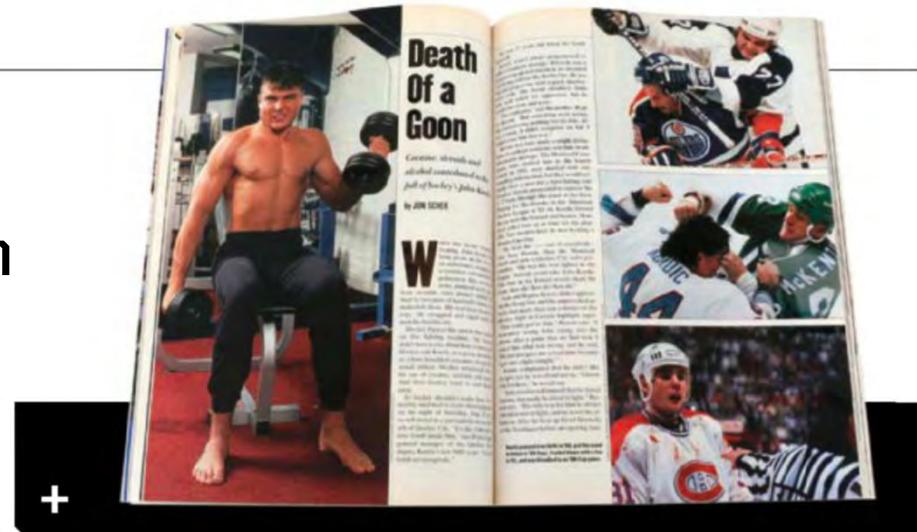
Death of a Goon

Aug. 24, 1992

ON AUG. 8, 1992, police in Quebec City were called to the motel room of a 27-year-old with a history of cocaine and steroid abuse who was causing a disturbance. It took nine officers to subdue the 6' 2", 238-pound man and get him into an ambulance. He died shortly after arriving at the hospital. His name was John Kordic, a minor league hockey player who just six years before had lived every Canadian kid's dream by winning a Stanley Cup, with Montreal.

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED made no mention of Kordic's passing in its next issue, but it came back with an investigative piece the following week that explored Kordic's brief and troubled life and the circumstances of his passing. It was called "Death of a Goon." Here, the principals involved with the story—the writer, Jon Scher, now an editor at ESPN.com; hockey editor Paul Fichtenbaum, now the chief content officer of The Athletic; and managing editor Mark Mulvoy, now retired—recount how SI tackled the subject and the controversy caused by the story's headline.

SCHER: I had only been covering hockey for three months. The idea was that I would go and do a reporting file for another writer. I believe it was senior editor Sandy Padwe who said to do all the reporting, but instead of sending them a file, just write the story myself. And so I did. *Kordic made little impact as a*



player, scoring just 17 goals and 35 points in seven seasons for the Canadiens, Maple Leafs, Capitals and Nordiques. He did, however, have 997 penalty minutes.

SCHER: It's an old story in the NHL: He wanted to be a skater and a scorer, but he wasn't good enough. But he was good with his fists. John's family members believed that part of the reason why he spiraled into alcoholism, depression and drug use was that he was disappointed in himself in part because he portrayed himself and behaved like a goon.

FICHTENBAUM: Everybody had a story about John Kordic. He had demons, and everybody knew it.

The story got attention for reporting that Kordic had told a friend that a Canadiens coach had once witnessed him doing cocaine and had done nothing about it.

SCHER: Today I would have had to defend that on eight different forms of social media. It was a bit of a window into the dark side of the NHL. Everyone was amazingly willing to talk. I started with the motel room, where the incident that led to his death had taken place. I tracked down his fiancée, who was a former nude dancer living

in Quebec. Eventually I even flew with his family back to Edmonton.

"When the story came out, I got a call from John's sister, who was devastated by the headline," says Scher. "What is most vivid to me is how upset she was by that."

No one could remember who wrote the headline, but it became the aspect of the story that caused the most regret.

SCHER: I promised the family that I'd do a fair accounting of what happened to John. I believe we did that. When the story came out, I got a call from John's sister, who was devastated by the headline. When I think back, what is most vivid to me is how upset she was by that. I don't think it was wrong, but I wish there had been more sensitivity.

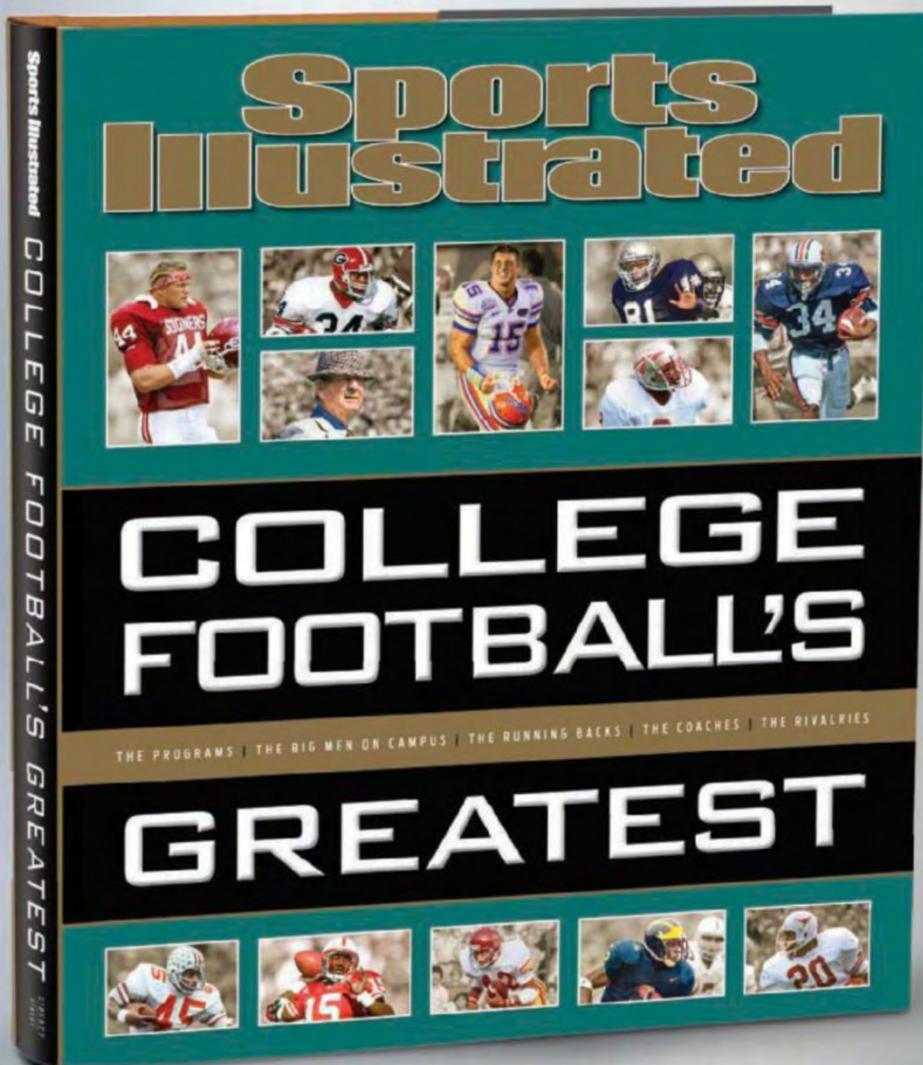
MULVOY: The word *goon* bothered people, but that's what he was.

FICHTENBAUM: *Goon* has negative connotations, and given the loss of life, in retrospect it was not an appropriate headline. If I had to do it again, I'd have fought hard to have a different headline.

SCHER: You get into the business to work on stories that matter. This tapped into an aspect of the NHL that a lot of people didn't realize. We were able to shine a light on that. I was proud of the work, but I was always aware that this was a tragedy, somebody's brother, son, fiancé that they tried to save but couldn't.

THE BEST OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Who is the greatest running back of all time? How about the most brilliant coach? What was the best game ever? SI's team of experts once and for all settles the questions college football fans have been debating since the first kickoff



Go onto the field, into the locker rooms and behind the scenes as only SI can take you, with the classic stories and trademark photography that you've come to expect

**NOW AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD.
PURCHASE YOUR COPY TODAY**

**Sports
Illustrated**

GAME of

AS THE TEXANS TURN

All eyes in Houston's camp are on the team's QB battle—and you can be sure the contestants are eyeing each other.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE
SEXIEST, HIGHEST-PAYING
JOB IN THE NFL, THE
COMPETITION TO BE NO. 1
IS . . . WELL, IT'S THE KIND
OF THING YOU TELL STORIES
ABOUT FOR DECADES

BY JONATHAN
JONES

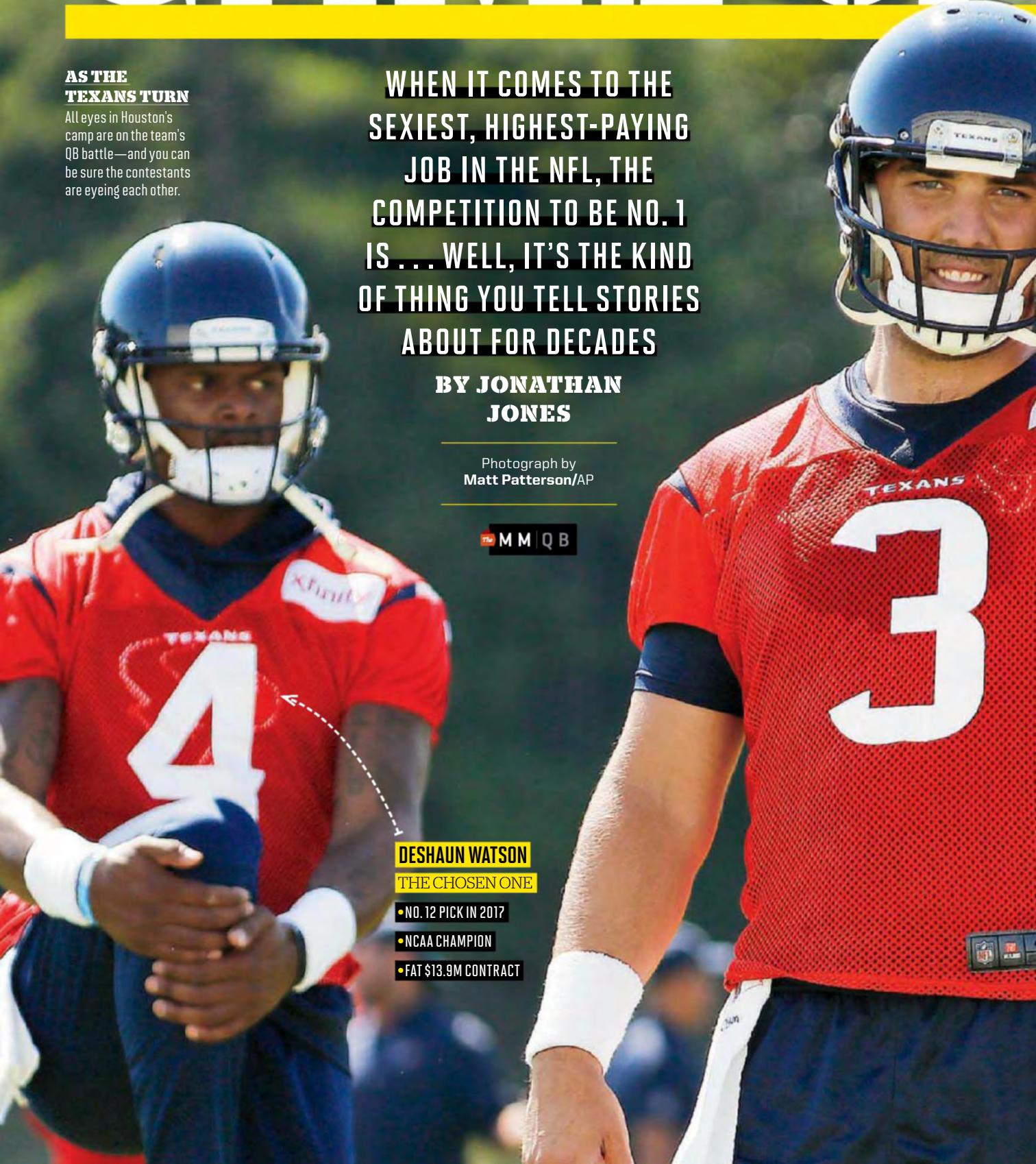
Photograph by
Matt Patterson/AP

THE MM QB

DESHAUN WATSON

THE CHOSEN ONE

- NO. 12 PICK IN 2017
- NCAA CHAMPION
- FAT \$13.9M CONTRACT



THROWS



TOM SAVAGE

THE HOLDOVER

- SERVICEABLE TWO-GAME STARTER IN '16
- ONE CAREER INT
- ALSO: ZERO TDS

BRANDON WEEDEN

THE OTHER GUY

- 57.9% CAREER COMP. RATE
- HAS 25 CAREER STARTS, BUT...
- DIDN'T PLAY A DOWN IN '16

GAME OF THROWS

S

We were at the stadium right before pregame, and Crennel said, 'Heads or tails?' I think D.A. called it. That's how the starter at the first preseason game was decided."

BILLS 1998-2000

ROB JOHNSON

The Big Signee

- TRADED FROM JAGS IN '98
- FOR R1 AND R4 DRAFT PICKS
- FAT \$25M CONTRACT
- IMMEDIATELY NAMED STARTER

DOUG FLUTIE

The Underdog

- FAMOUS FOR '84 "HAIFLUTIE"
- WASHED OUT OF NFL IN '90
- EXILED TO CFL
- \$300K SALARY IN '98



O YOU like conflict? You crave deception and double-speak and plot twists and . . . heck, there are only so many more episodes of *Game of Thrones* remaining.

Consider as an alternative, then, the NFL, where we're staring down at least five cutthroat training-camp quarterback battles in August, including in parts of the country where postseason ambitions are openly discussed in September. In Cleveland, coach Hue Jackson told reporters that Cody Kessler deserves "the chance to walk out there first" at camp ahead of Brock Osweiler and rookie DeShone Kizer—but Kizer already has observers talking about upheaval at the position. In White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., where Houston is holding camp, Bill O'Brien has simultaneously gushed about Tom Savage's "really good training camp" and about Deshaun Watson's being "way ahead of" any rookie QB he's ever seen. In New York, the Jets are still figuring out whether they can put 2016 second-round pick Christian Hackenberg on the field ahead of Bryce Petty and veteran Josh McCown. In Denver, Vance Joseph has said it'd be "ideal" to decide between Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch by Week 3 of the preseason. And in Chicago, where everyone says veteran Mike Glennon will be the Week 1 starter, Mitch Trubisky, the second pick in the '17 draft, is proving that he's already got the hang of this *Game of Thrones* thing. "Mike's the starter," says Trubisky, future face of the franchise, "and I'm behind him all the way." *Mhm.*

To gain some insight into what actually happens in the throes of a training camp battle, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED spoke with 10 former and current quarterbacks, ranging from Heisman-winning first-round picks (the anointed) to undrafted players (the annoying), from Super Bowl winners to spot starters. If there's one theme that emerged, it's this: There's no right way to hold a QB competition.

KURT WARNER, WHO WON SUPER BOWL XXXIV WITH THE RAMS IN 2000 BUT FOUND HIMSELF IN COMPETITION WITH '06 FIRST-ROUND PICK MATT LEINART AT CARDINALS CAMP IN '07 AND '08: When you're a veteran who's played and had success, one thing you assume is that you'll have the upper hand from the standpoint of the system or understanding how to play the game.

RODNEY PEETE, WHO STARTED EIGHT GAMES FOR THE LIONS IN 1989, ONLY TO SEE DETROIT DRAFT HEISMAN WINNER ANDRE WARE IN '90: Andre and I did not have a great relationship because he came in very entitled, like he was going to step in and be the starter, take all the reps, just because he was drafted in the first round. I was like, *Hooold* on, fella. There was tension and animosity.

WARE: Well, I don't know if I had any expectations. You're drafted and you expect to come in and at least be given an opportunity.

JAKE DELHOMME, WHO IN 2003 SIGNED WITH THE PANTHERS, WITH WHOM PEETE HAD LANDED AND WON SEVEN GAMES THE YEAR BEFORE: I was the young kid [28], and I was going to be given a chance at some point. That's kind of how it was always portrayed to me.

PEETE: I'm sure [Jake] was looking at it like, Rodney's 37 years old and he won't be here long, so it will eventually be my team. That's how you analyze where you go. But he didn't come in with any attitude of, I'm trying to take over.

DELHOMME: I can't really say it was a competition where, Oh gosh, I'm trying to beat him out. We got along very well, to be quite honest.

Others, not so much.

DOUG FLUTIE, WHO IN 1998 SIGNED WITH THE BILLS STRAIGHT OUT OF THE CFL, AND THEN BATTLED THREE STRAIGHT CAMPS WITH ROB JOHNSON, WHO ARRIVED FROM JACKSONVILLE IN EXCHANGE FOR FIRST- AND FOURTH-ROUND DRAFT PICKS: When I signed it was, Well, I'll have a chance to compete for the starting job. Weeks later Rob signs for big money. Mine was a very minimal contract, so the writing was on the wall. That's when the goal kind of shifted to, I just hope I make the team.

JOHNSON: When Doug signed it was kind of a joke, to be honest—no offense to Doug. No one in the NFL really thought much of it. Until I got hurt [in Week 1] and he got his chance and played well, it wasn't really thought of that seriously. [Flutie won Comeback Player of the Year that season and then



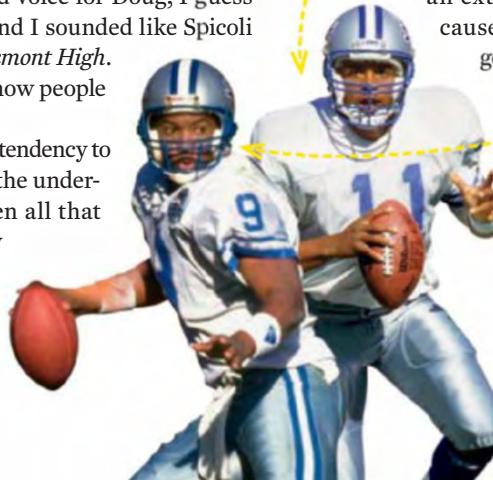


signed a four-year \$22 million extension.] When they signed Doug to a big deal, I was like, All right, I'm out. I was over it.

FLUTIE: [In 1999], I had a legitimate contract now, but I honestly don't recall any friction at that point. He probably hoped he'd be the guy to play.

JOHNSON: My stats [in 1998] were better than his, but his win-loss record was better than mine. It was the perfect storm. He was the underdog; I was a prototypical quarterback with size. He had the autistic son he did commercials with—that pulled at people's heartstrings; I was the surfer boy from California. A local radio station had this skit where they used a high-pitched voice for Doug, I guess because he was short, and I sounded like Spicoli from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. It was hilarious. That's how people thought of it.

FLUTIE: I know fans have a tendency to root for the little guy or the underdog. That may have been all that was. I don't know how his relationship with the fans was. I just went out and played.



As Flutie, Johnson and many others have come to realize: Whatever you're told the day you sign, that isn't always the reality when you get to camp.

MARK BRUNELL, WHO WAS TRADED TO THE REDSKINS IN 2004, ONLY TO BATTLE WITH—AND EVENTUALLY LOSE HIS JOB TO—PATRICK RAMSEY: [Washington coach] Joe Gibbs didn't bring me in to be the backup. I was much more accomplished than Patrick, who was considerably younger than me. I was going to be the starter. I don't think

there was any question about that.

JOSH JOHNSON, WHO WAS DRAFTED BY THE BUCANEERS IN 2008 AND THEN SPENT FOUR STRAIGHT SUMMERS COMPETING FOR FIRST-TEAM REPS IN CAMP: I was told [entering '09] that I was going to be competing for a starting job. There's a difference between what's going on and what you're told sometimes—I got a feel for that fairly quickly when the reps got split up and I was barely getting any.

DELHOMME: The first week of training camp [in 2003], and even in OTAs, reps were split evenly with the ones, twos, threes and fours. Not many teams do that. If you have 20 plays per period, the starter usually gets 10 or 12, the backup gets four or five. . . . With [coach John] Fox, it was five-five-five-five.

PEETE: When you're an older player, quarterback or not, you're O.K. splitting reps in training camp because you're saving your body. [Aside from reps], I was treated as the No. 1.

WARNER: That [2007 Cardinals] training camp was extremely frustrating as they bounced us in and out and gave us different reps. Matt held the starter's reps for the most part, but in my mind there was no question: I was the better quarterback in everything we were doing. It was an extremely frustrating camp because I was told the best guy was

going to play, and I had the bar set against me already.

WARE: I can't remember how the reps were divvied up [with Rodney], but it was never like we were competing to see who won the job. There were a lot of dynamics in terms of who had drafted me, who'd left and

THE MMQB

CARDINALS 2006-09

KURT WARNER

The Ex-Champ

- UNDRAFTED IN '94
- TWO-TIME NFL MVP
- 33 WHEN HE ARRIVED IN ARIZONA

MATT LEINART

The First-Round Pick

- HEISMAN WINNER
- NO. 10 PICK IN '06
- \$45M CONTRACT

LIONS 1990-93

ANDRE WARE

Mr. Heisman

- NO. 7 PICK IN '90
- HAND-PICKED BY G.M. JERRY VAINISI

RODNEY PEETE

The Stopgap

- SIXTH-ROUND PICK IN '89
- 3-5 AS A ROOKIE FILL-IN

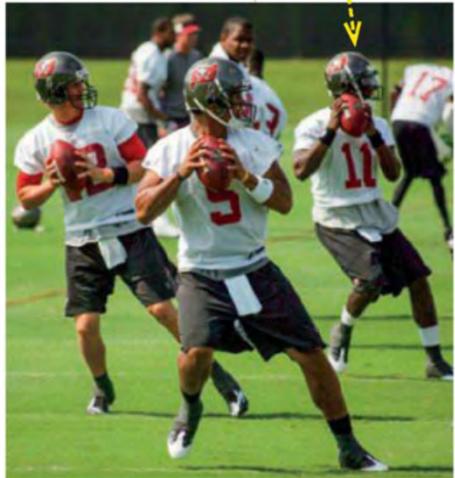
GAME OF THROWS

BUCANEERS 2009-11

JOSH JOHNSON

The Camp Body

- FIFTH-ROUND PICK IN '08
- ENTERED CAMPS BEHIND THE LIKES OF JEFF GARCIA, JOSH FREEMAN, BYRON LEFTWICH



REDSKINS 2004-05

MARK BRUNELL

The Proven Winner

- JAGS' ALLTIME PASSING LEADER
- THREE-TIME PRO BOWLER
- 33 WHEN HE ARRIVED IN WASHINGTON

PATRICK RAMSEY

Last Year's Guy

- SKINS STARTER IN TWO PREVIOUS SEASONS
- FAVE OF COACH STEVE SPURRIER—WHO WAS GONE

who remained in the front office. All of those components play into a competition.

PEETE: [In 1993, after three years of losing out to me], Andre was more animated about getting his shot. We went to London to play a preseason game [against the Cowboys], and we were warming up, stretching. I'd been named the starter going into camp, and I'd started the first exhibition game. [Offensive coordinator] Dan Henning comes up to me and goes, "Uh, Andre's talked to the owner, and he's going to start the game today." This is like 20 minutes before kickoff. And I guess because we were in London I let it roll off my shoulders. But I was pissed off.

WARE: I've never wanted anything given to me other than a fair opportunity to compete on a level playing field—not because you've coached a guy's dad or because this guy's dad is in the NFL or whatever the circumstances were. When I played, I think I did a fair enough job to warrant being given an opportunity to start.

Even when coaches try splitting camp reps right down the middle, that's not always the perfect solution.

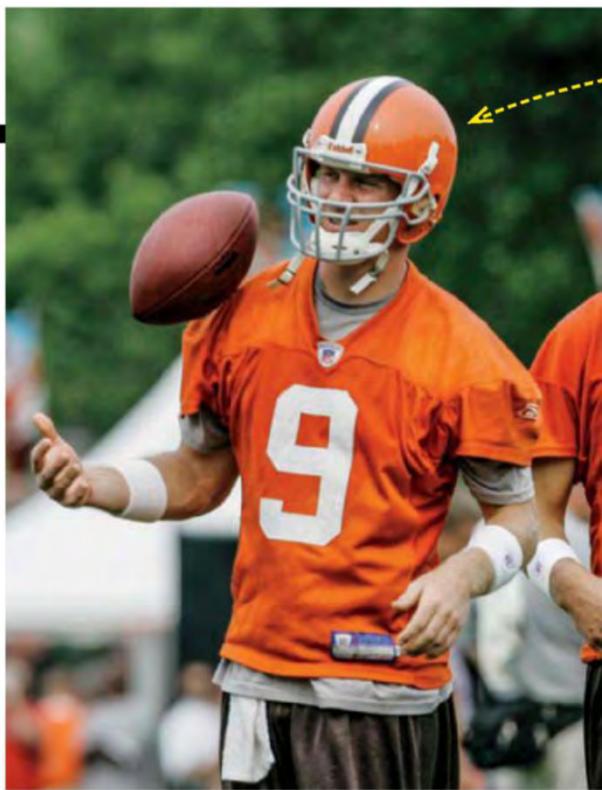
BRUNELL: I didn't like [splitting repetitions]. In 2004, I felt like I didn't have enough reps to get ready for the season. You need

to have time with the starting receivers and the offensive line while learning a new system, and going back and forth between ones and twos was frustrating to me. I went into the season not feeling prepared at all.

CHARLIE FRYE, WHO IN 2007 BATTLED FOR REPS IN BROWNS CAMP WITH DEREK ANDERSON AND BRADY QUINN, A FIRST-ROUND PICK THAT SPRING: Me and Derek would rotate daily who went with the ones. They worked Brady in [when he ended his rookie-contract holdout]—he'd take the threes and then he'd take some of the ones from whoever's day it was. It's really hard to get three guys ready to be the starter.

ANDERSON: It wasn't really split evenly . . . because you *can't* really split it evenly. It's hard.

FRYE: Before one preseason game, Derek and [Browns coach] Romeo Crennel and I were at the stadium right before pregame, just us three, and [Crennel] said, "Heads or tails?" I think D.A.



called it. That's how the starter at the first pre-season game was decided.

ANDERSON: It was odd. But [Crennel] was such a good dude, and I honestly don't think he knew where to go with it at the time. There were outside things intervening with the whole process. Different people had different opinions on who should play, and I don't think it was ultimately his decision.

Even when one QB wins out in camp—or just wins a coin flip—a regular-season game or two can undo a summer's worth of competition.

BRUNELL: If you're not winning games, the quarterback's the first one to go, which I understand. It came as no surprise [when I was pulled halfway through the 2004 season after dealing with a hamstring problem]; I probably would have benched me too. But you've got to have some time practicing in the system. For most guys it takes a year to get comfortable. We just didn't have that in camp.

ROB JOHNSON: [In 1999] I saw the writing on the wall, saw how it looked, and I knew it wasn't an





Sometimes it gets personal. Sometimes it's money-driven. Sometimes it's about a draft pick. There were times I wanted to scream, times I thought about retiring because I was like, This doesn't make sense!

WARE: Would I have loved to have gotten the keys to the car for even a half-season, and then let's see where we go from there? *Absolutely.* But you can't twist someone's arm and force those things to happen. [Ware never started more than three games in a season for Detroit. He didn't appear in an NFL game after 1993.]

ANDERSON: Weird things kind

of played out, but everything shook out the way it probably should have. [Anderson was named QB2 after the third exhibition game in 2007, but he took over halfway through Week 1 and played every remaining game in what would be a Pro Bowl season.]

FRYE: I think the earlier you can decide who your starter is, the better for the team—they'll know who to rally around. It's also better for those individuals who are going through the competition. It takes a toll on you emotionally, mentally. [Frye was traded to Seattle after Week 1.]

JOSH JOHNSON: In camp [in 2009] I went from fourth on the depth chart to second. Three weeks later I went from second to starting. [Johnson went 0-4 as a starter, then was benched.] I wasn't the first quarterback to be put in that situation, and I won't be the last. Would I say I got a fair shot? No. But it was an NFL shot. □

MMQB

BROWNS 2007

CHARLIE FRYE

Worth a Shot

- BROKE BROWNS' SINGLE-GAME ROOKIE PASSER-RATING RECORD IN '05
- 6-12 OVER FIRST TWO SEASONS WITH CLEVELAND

BRADY QUINN

The Golden Domer

- FIRST-ROUND DRAFTEE FROM NOTRE DAME—BACK WHEN IT MATTERED
- FAT \$20.2M CONTRACT

DEREK ANDERSON

Aw, Why Not?

- SIXTH-ROUND PICK BY RAVENS IN '05—WAIVED
- LED PROMISING 4Q COMEBACK IN RELIEF VS. K.C. IN '06

PANTHERS 2003-04

JAKE DELHOMME

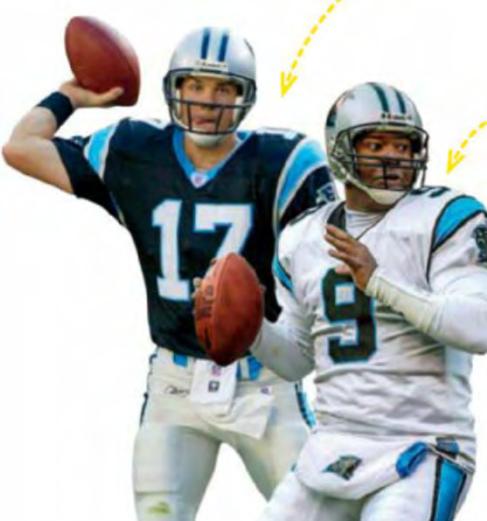
The Long Shot

- UNDRAFTED IN '97
- SPENT TWO YEARS IN USFL
- TEENY \$4M CONTRACT

RODNEY PEETE

Him Again?

- WINNING RECORD OVER 86 STARTS IN 13 SEASONS
- HELPED RIGHT PANTHERS' SHIP AFTER 1-15 CAMPAIGN IN '01



Sent From Mount

ZION

THE VIRAL THUNDER-DUNKS
DELIVERED BY **ZION WILLIAMSON** DON'T
MERELY DEMORALIZE OPPONENTS.
THEY HAVE MADE HIM BETTER
KNOWN THAN ANY PREP STAR EVER.
(YES, INCLUDING LEBRON)





HIGH SCHOOL
BASKETBALL

BY CHRIS
JOHNSON

Photograph by
SIMON BRUTY

THE OBLITERATION was not an ad-lib. As the fast break unfolded, Zion Williamson watched the 6' 4" shooting guard on the team he was facing gather the ball near the free throw line. From just beyond midcourt Williamson darted toward the basket, shortened his stride and timed his approach before exploding off two feet, extending his arms like a volleyball player trying to block a spike at the net and swatting the ball off the glass. Witnesses would express concern for Williamson's safety after he appeared to slam his head before landing with a thud, though not before wondering: Is the backboard O.K.?

The sequence on July 13 was recorded by many of those packed into the Upward Star Center, a 60-acre, multi-purpose sports complex in Williamson's hometown of Spartanburg, S.C., but the version captured by the app Overtime was retweeted and liked more than 16,000 times combined and served as the centerpiece for a handful of blog posts. "Check Out Zion Williamson Destroying This Wayward Dunk Attempt," Deadspin urged readers. "Zion Williamson Is a Man Among Boys and This Block Proves It," SB Nation proclaimed. Jerry Meyer, the basketball

scouting director for 247Sports, jokingly tweeted that Williamson "could have easily been charged [with] attempted homicide." The possibility that Williamson would pull off more plays like this kept fans around until the final buzzer, even as his South Carolina Supreme team was on its way to a 16-point loss in the Adidas Gauntlet Finale.

Afterward the 6' 7", 240-pound 17-year-old retreated to an enclave outside the main entrance to carve out a few minutes away from the intense spotlight he feels almost everywhere he goes. Despite the presence of a family friend serving as a de facto bodyguard—a 35-year-old former security guard with a shaved head and a thick red beard—Zion was intercepted over the course of the weekend by an autograph-seeker bearing a custom-made version of Williamson's high school jersey, a man with a ponytail and a facial hair pattern reminiscent of a WWE heel and a giddy woman in a Mexico national soccer team jersey, which Williamson politely signed. Perhaps the only time he sat unbothered for more than a couple of minutes was when he scarfed down a plate of mini cheeseburgers, meatloaf and mashed potatoes at a nearby Golden Corral with his teammates.

The chase-down rejection was a viral hit, but Williamson is known primarily for his mind-blowing dunks. He has claimed the No. 1 play on *SportsCenter's* Top 10, attracted interest from *Good Morning America*, received a Twitter shoutout from Steph Curry and struck up a texting relationship with Canadian rapper Drake. Among high school basketball players Williamson is a celebrity on a scale perhaps not seen since LeBron James. Other prep stars, such as John Wall, Thon Maker and Seventh Woods, have captivated millions of viewers with memorable mixtapes, and LaMelo Ball, the youngest brother in America's most inescapable hoops family, has cultivated a vast online following, thanks mostly to his publicity-hungry father. But Williamson is unique in his capacity to consistently produce stunning plays that send tremors across basketball Twitter and serve as fodder for mesmerizing YouTube clips.

His exalted status almost obscures the fact that Williamson is rated no lower than No. 3 in the class of 2018 by any major recruiting service, including No. 1 by 247Sports. Although the lefty says he views himself as a two or a three, he seems like a cross between Larry Johnson and Blake Griffin. Williamson is a bouncy power player in a jumbo tight end's body with a tight handle, the heft to bang in the low post and the quickness to fly by wings. One high-major assistant describes Williamson as a "freak of nature" and says, "You don't see people his height play that high above the rim." Adds Meyer, "He plays with a ferocity that you hardly ever see at this level."

WILLIAMSON IS the son of two former athletes—Sharonda Sampson, a 5' 10" sprinter, and Lateef Williamson, a 6' 4" defensive lineman—who both attended Division II Livingstone College in Salisbury, N.C. Sampson chose his first name as she was "thumbing through the Bible, but Zion just came to

SIR MIX-A-LOT

With his tight end build and eye-popping hops, Williamson has a game well-suited to filling mixtapes, drawing views online and building a star-studded legion of fans.



me." When he was five, Zion remembers telling his stepdad, Lee Anderson, a former point guard at Clemson and the coach of Zion's club team, that he wanted to play college basketball. He was waking up at 5 a.m. for workouts by the time he was nine, and he received his first scholarship offer in the ninth grade (from Wofford, a liberal arts school in Spartanburg). But there was little reason to suspect that Williamson would outshine other elite prospects.

For starters, he attends Spartanburg Day School, a private institution with 450 students and a strong academic reputation. It's 75 miles southwest of Charlotte, in a part of the Palmetto State that a certain cutthroat Netflix politician calls

home and where Friday night lights reign supreme. Spartanburg Day, however, does not field a football team—"We don't have the numbers," athletic director Rita Harrell says—but the basketball coach, Lee Sartor (also a sheriff's deputy in Spartanburg County), has known Anderson for more than a decade. "We were looking for the school that would complement [Zion] and prepare him for college," Anderson says.

Williamson dominated opponents in the South Carolina Independent School Association (SCISA) early in his career, but he needed to prove himself against better competition. The summer after his sophomore year he earned co-MVP awards at a pair of prestigious recruiting showcases: the National Basketball Players Association Top 100 camp and the Under Armour Elite 24. While those honors cemented Williamson's status as a top-tier recruit, something else lifted his profile to the point where he's even recognized on other continents: Kids approached him while he was in Italy for an Adidas basketball trip in June and asked, "Are you Zee-on Williamson?"

big-name athletes like Falcons linebacker Vic Beasley and former Clemson quarterback Tajh Boyd made appearances. Spartanburg Day hired a professional-events staff to deal with the surge of Zion devotees trying to get into their home gym, which has a capacity of 1,000. People began sending items for Williamson to sign and calling Spartanburg Day asking to speak to him. Page views on the school's athletics home page increased more than 350% during basketball season. Rachel Deems, the head of school, recalls a group of young men who drove from Florida hoping to secure a lunch meeting with Williamson. He wasn't around. "They looked so downcast," Deems says. Williamson may have a hard time going out without constantly drawing double takes, but he doesn't resent the attention. "No part of this bothers me," he says.

The crowds that cram into gyms for his games are usually treated to the sight of a teenager performing an in-air ballet before pulverizing the rim. There was the time when Williamson cupped the ball with his left hand, spun 360° and

ZION'S GREATEST ONLINE HITS



DEC. 10, 2016

The most sensational moments from his 47-point game against Anderson (S.C.) Christian. 1,625,875 views on EliteMixtapes



FEB. 14, 2017

A 360° windmill dunk against Shannon Forest Christian (Greenville, S.C.) ranked No. 1 on SportsCenter's Top 10. 683,748 views on EliteMixtapes



MARCH 13, 2017

Almost four minutes of highlights covering his junior season, with at least 49 indelible throw downs. 767,593 views on Ballislife



MARCH 31, 2017

Clips from another 47-point outburst, this time against the tough Arkansas Wings in EYBL play. 1,177,388 views on MeetMeAtTheRim



JULY 13, 2017

A stunning, from-behind block against the backboard—followed by a frightening fall. 391,093 views on Ballislife

In January 2017, Drake posted a photo to his Instagram account of more than 37 million followers; himself wearing a Williamson Spartanburg Day jersey. (Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. followed suit a few months later.) The post nudged Williamson's level of fame into the mainstream, and the two stars now text each other periodically.

At Spartanburg Day last season, game times and venues were adjusted in anticipation of large crowds for Williamson, who then often hung around for 30 to 45 minutes for photo and autograph sessions. Fans with no connection to either team drove hours—from as far as Maine, according to an SCISA administrator—to see him up close, and

jammed during warmups. Or the game when he skied for an alley-oop and pulled off a one-handed windmill. These slams are catnip for mixtape outlets, which package highlights into short videos. Bryce Lanning of EliteMixtapes estimates that he went to about a dozen Spartanburg Day games last season, and Ballislife East had one of its videographers, Donnie Bui, relocate from Raleigh to Charlotte to be closer to Williamson. "As crazy as that sounds, my company literally moved me last year for four months because of a kid," Bui says. The 11 Williamson videos Ballislife uploaded to its main YouTube channel had amassed more than four million views by mid-July.

WHEN LEBRON JAMES blossomed into an A-list superstar at St. Vincent-St. Mary High in Akron, Ohio, more than 15 years ago, neither Twitter nor YouTube existed, and it was difficult to imagine a world in which network and cable television were not the dominant media for watching sports. An SI reporter noted in a February 2002 cover story on James that he “checked his two-way pager for messages from pals.” Now Amazon owns rights to stream NFL games, and Williamson, a player who’s often compared with James, can use a smartphone to upload a selfie for his more than 924,000 Instagram followers in less time than it takes to execute a self alley-oop dunk.

The widespread availability of Zion videos—whether for casual sports fans scrolling through their Twitter feeds or hardwood junkies embarking on a YouTube deep dive—has enabled him to develop a huge fan base even without heavy media coverage of his games or aggressive self-promotion. No background knowledge is required to delight in a future lottery pick yammering—that’s what the kids say—on a skinny 5' 8" point guard in rec specs. Ray Gamache, the author of the book *A History of Sports*



It is destruction, not showmanship, that consumes Williamson in that split second before HE BRINGS THE HOUSE DOWN.

Highlights: Replayed Plays from Edison to ESPN, terms this phenomenon the “de-contextualization of individual plays.” Gamache notes that Mike Eruzione’s game-deciding wrist-shot goal in the Miracle on Ice, one of the greatest sports moments ever, wasn’t a remarkable play by itself. “You need to know the context there,” Gamache says. By contrast, Williamson’s dunks are engrossing all on their own. No explanation needed.

Demographics make this virtual environment particularly fruitful for hoops highlights. Social media users skew young, and data from a study conducted for *SportsBusiness Journal* indicates that the median age of NBA television viewers in 2016 (42) was younger than all but one other major American sports league (Major League Soccer, 40) and that it has the second highest percentage (11) of viewers under 18. (MLS is first with 15.) NBA consumers naturally are more inclined to watch high school basketball clips, like ones featuring Williamson, than those showing other prep sports.

Social media offers a certain authenticity to consumers

of sports videos that is missing from traditional broadcasts. Clicking on a low-grade clip of Williamson going off for 40 points inside a packed gym with rickety wooden bleachers is a completely different experience from tuning into a *Monday Night Football* game with 20 commercial breaks and lengthy pre- and postgame productions. “[These videos have] created some intimacy in the sense that I feel more connected because I’m closer to the action,” says Jimmy Sanderson, the president of the social media strategy consulting company Sanderson Media Group.

Some may wince at the ways mixtapes, complete with absurd comparisons in hyperbolic headlines, can breed unrealistic expectations for players a year or more away from picking out their prom suits, but any pushback against these videos should be tempered by the realization that they often perform a valuable service. The recognition that comes with being seen by hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions, of people amounts to early-stage brand-building. “If managed correctly, that can be a long-term asset,” says



CAROLINA DREAMING

Ranked by some services the No. 1 recruit in the class of '18, Zion is choosing from among 30 scholarship offers while navigating the countless obstacles of teenage celebrity.

Darin White, the chair of the entrepreneurship, management and marketing department at Samford, Sonny Vaccaro, an influential former marketing executive for major shoe companies, says that if players like Williamson go on to become high draft picks, the attention they've gained through mixtapes could add "millions of dollars to their value." Adds Vaccaro, "If they can play, it's money in the bank."

IT IS HARD to imagine that Williamson won't finish his high school career as one of the top-ranked players in his recruiting class, but skeptics will continue to question whether he's anything more than a dunkmaster. Williamson counters that the jams impact the game by energizing his teammates and demoralizing the opposition. The intricate choreography of a vintage Zion banger—the runup, the liftoff, the grip, the throw down—betrays his simple mind-set when he's gliding toward the basket. It is destruction, not showmanship, that consumes him in that split second before he brings the house down. "I'm thinking, *I'm about to crush this dunk*," he says.

Williamson has not set a timetable for choosing a college, though he hopes to make the decision before his senior season. He plans to stay at Spartanburg Day despite attempts from other prep programs to poach him. Asked about the possibility of going one-and-done in college, Williamson says, "If the opportunity to go to the NBA is there, then I'm going to take it." For now, he'll keep trying to get better, although he isn't focused on any one skill. "I'm still young," he says. "I have a lot to learn, so I'm going to continue to work on everything." Williamson's time away from the court will include heavy doses of anime shows like *Naruto* and *Dragon Ball Z*, and maybe he'll test his conviction that he's an "unstoppable" Connect Four player. If nobody challenges Williamson, this will: keeping his daily life at least somewhat ordinary.

On a Tuesday night in mid-July, Williamson walked into a McDonald's in Spartanburg for a quick meal following a South Carolina Supreme workout that concluded with a determined TV reporter doing several takes of a segment in which he tossed Williamson alley-oop passes. A woman in the restaurant got Williamson's attention to tell him that she had seen videos of him and asked for a picture. He trudged over to the soda fountain, only to be confronted by a man who implored him to attend North Carolina. After Williamson sat down with his 20-piece Chicken McNuggets box and large fries, the man returned with a surprising request. "That's a Bible," Williamson said of the object the man wanted autographed. "I don't know how I feel about signing that." He obliged.

Less than a day later Williamson was back in the gym with teammates, pumping out five pushups as punishment for a missed free throw. Soon he was sprinting, backpedaling and pivoting—palms up, shoulders square—while grinding through a defensive shuffling drill. Anderson looked on,

barking words of encouragement. "Good work, Z!" The squeaking sneakers, rim clanks and loud echoes provided a familiar sound track, but something felt off. There was a sense of calm that eludes Williamson in most public settings.

The workout took place at Spartanburg Day's Stone Family Court, the same hardwood where, next winter, hundreds of Zion devotees will hoist their smartphones in unison. They won't want to miss a moment of action before recording his dunks and posting them on the Internet. □

DO A 360

This page is enabled for augmented reality: To see Williamson in action, right on your phone, follow the directions below.





**Here's to
reaching higher
and flying farther.**

Since 1957, Symetra has celebrated people and businesses that want to reach higher and fly farther—by offering them the life insurance, retirement annuities, and employee benefits they need to help them get there. To take flight, learn more at Symetra.com/AboutSymetra or contact your advisor.

Bethany Hamilton Pro Surfer



Insurance and annuities are issued by, and employer and employee benefits are insured by, Symetra Life Insurance Company (est. 1957), 777 108th Ave NE, Suite 1200, Bellevue, WA 98004 and are not available in all U.S. states or any U.S. territory. In New York, life insurance and annuities are issued and employer and employee benefits are insured by, First Symetra National Life Insurance Company of New York, New York, NY (est. 1990), mailing address P.O. Box 34690, Seattle, WA 98124. Symetra Life Insurance Company, not a licensed insurer in New York, is the parent company of First Symetra National Insurance Company of New York. Each company is responsible for its own financial obligations. Symetra® is a registered service mark of Symetra Life Insurance Company.

SYM-1128

7/17



IS YOUR TEAM READY?
**OR ARE THEY THE
READIEST?**



AN IHG® HOTEL

PROUD SPONSOR OF THE



STAY SMART. **BE THE READIEST.™**

SAVE UP TO 15%* WHEN YOU BOOK EARLY AT HOLIDAYINNEXPRESS.COM.

*Terms apply

2017 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW



COVER QBS

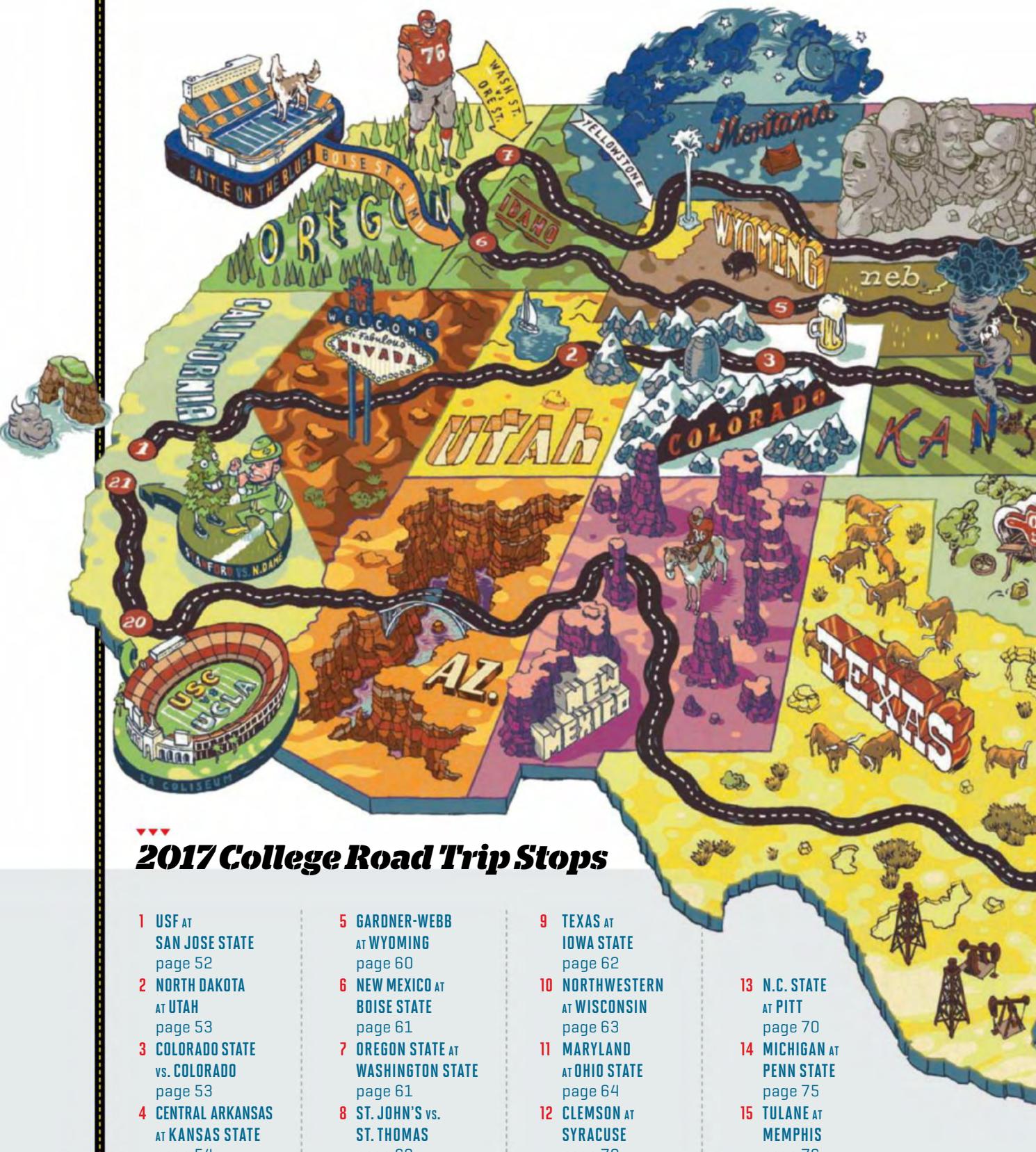
[Clockwise from top left]: Mason Rudolph, J.T. Barrett, Sam Darnold and Jalen Hurts.

► **THIS IS HOW IT STARTED:** Four SI editors were sitting around a table. One said a buddy of his had just retired, bought an RV and was going to spend the 2017 college football season traveling the country, going from game to game. A debate ensued. Where should he go? Suddenly, we had an organizing principle for our '17 preview. Staff writer Joan Niesen got the daunting assignment to draw up a 13-week itinerary with these parameters: Start and end in the same place, cover as much ground as possible and design a trip that is feasible—there has to be enough time to drive from game to game.

USING EXPERIENCE GLEANED from her eight years on the road as a sportswriter—plus stints living in St. Louis, Washington, D.C., New York City, Dallas, Minneapolis, Denver and Chicago—and tapping into the collected wisdom of her SI colleagues, Niesen put together a trip chock full of games that included at least one headline attraction:

a rising program, a captivating player, a rivalry or an off-the-field tradition. She dropped in recommendations for places to eat and drink, sights to see and roads to explore. To supplement her suggestions we dropped in a few meals from Andy Staples's Top 25 College Town Meals (found in university towns of fewer than 500,000 people), which will run in its entirety this week on SI.com/eats.

THE TOUR PAUSES along the way to check in on the fate of the Big 12, the state of tackling and the new face of college football, Sam Darnold. The full trip is followed by our Top 25, with scouting reports that include insights from opposing coaches, statistical profiles and schedule analysis. So top off the tank, strap on your seat belt and rev up the engine. It's going to be a wild ride.



2017 College Road Trip Stops

1 USF AT SAN JOSE STATE page 52	5 GARDNER-WEBB AT WYOMING page 60	9 TEXAS AT IOWA STATE page 62	13 N.C. STATE AT PITT page 70
2 NORTH DAKOTA AT UTAH page 53	6 NEW MEXICO AT BOISE STATE page 61	10 NORTHWESTERN AT WISCONSIN page 63	14 MICHIGAN AT PENN STATE page 75
3 COLORADO STATE VS. COLORADO page 53	7 OREGON STATE AT WASHINGTON STATE page 61	11 MARYLAND AT OHIO STATE page 64	15 TULANE AT MEMPHIS page 76
4 CENTRAL ARKANSAS AT KANSAS STATE page 54	8 ST. JOHN'S VS. ST. THOMAS page 62	12 CLEMSON AT SYRACUSE page 70	



16 ARKANSAS
AT OLE MISS
page 76

17 IDAHO
AT TROY
page 76

18 LSU AT
ALABAMA
page 77

19 NEW MEXICO
AT TEXAS A&M
page 77

20 UCLA AT USC
page 78

21 NOTRE DAME
AT STANFORD
page 84

Week 1



SATURDAY, AUG. 26

USF AT SAN JOSE STATE

4:30 P.M. PDT

THURSDAY, AUG. 31
North Dakota
at *Utah*
5:30 P.M. MT

FRIDAY, SEPT. 1
Colorado State
at *Colorado*
6 P.M. MT

SATURDAY, SEPT. 2
Central Arkansas
at *Kansas St.*
6:10 P.M. CDT

The game should be over in time to catch the second half of the day's overseas game: Stanford vs. Rice in Sydney. We'd have sent you if we could, but adding a yacht into the mix for this journey seemed financially prohibitive. Instead, settle into a sports bar in charming downtown San Jose, grab some dinner and the end of the game. In the morning, head east toward Utah, stopping at Ikeda's California Country Market in Auburn for lunch. It's about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours down the road. From there, spend a night or two at Lake Tahoe before making the eight-hour drive across northern Nevada. Save time for Park City before heading to Salt Lake City.

STRONG START

The former Louisville and Texas coach inherits a talented team that could go undefeated against a soft schedule.

CATCH THE BEGINNING of the Charlie Strong era at USF as the Bulls start their season 3,000 miles from home. SI's preseason No. 17 team is the favorite to win the American Athletic Conference after an 11-win 2016. Senior quarterback Quinton Flowers is one of the most underrated passers in college ball, and there's a bit of Lamar Jackson in his dual-threat game, making him a dark horse Heisman candidate. In 2016 he passed for 2,812 yards, 24 touchdowns and seven interceptions while rushing for another 1,530 yards and 18 scores.

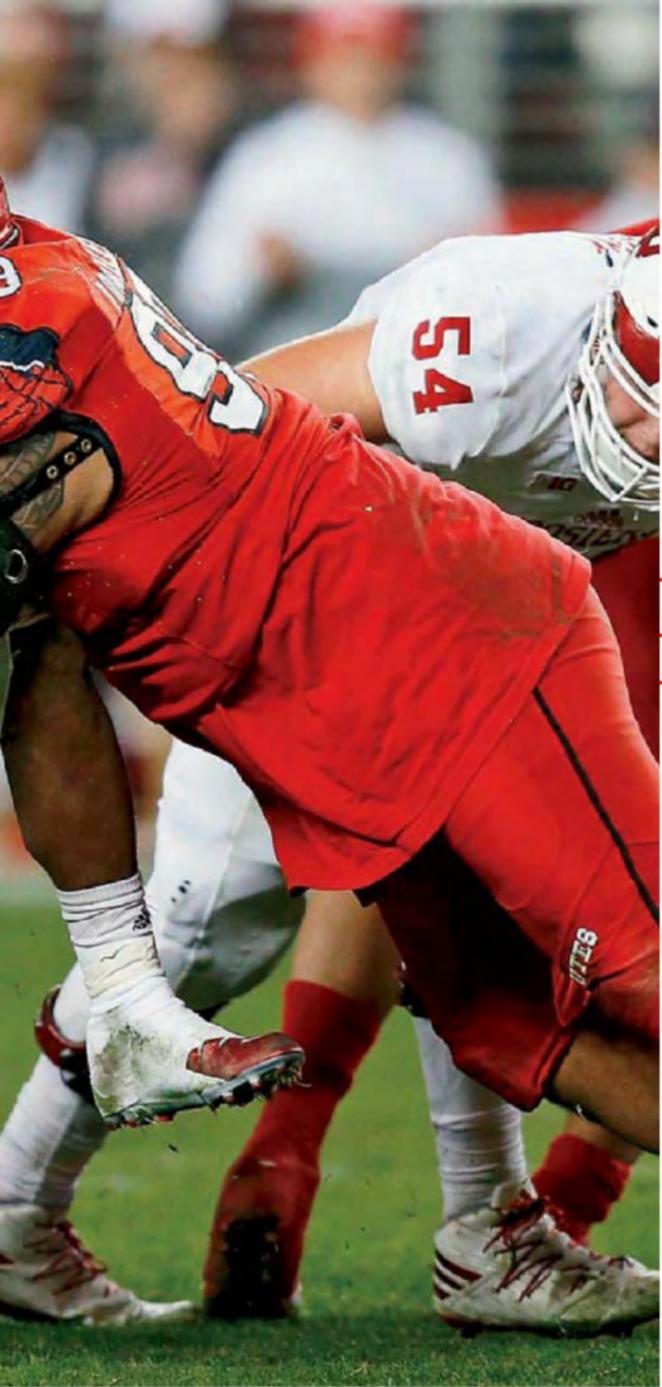
The game should be over in time to catch the second half of the day's overseas game: Stanford vs. Rice in Sydney. We'd have sent you if we could, but adding a yacht into the mix for this journey seemed financially prohibitive. Instead, settle into a sports bar in charming downtown San Jose, grab some dinner and the end of the



BUTTER FLIGHT AT RADINA'S BAKEHOUSE

Manhattan, Kans.
Wine flights are fine. Whiskey flights are better. But why should a delightfully horizontal sampling of flavors be limited to spirits? Why not do the same with butter? That's the innovation Radina's has brought to the world. Order a Snickers' mocha to sip while sampling their finest butters. They serve up a variety of fresh-baked breads, but the sourdough provides the perfect canvas to





ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES (BUTTER, 2); DOUG PENSINGER/GETTY IMAGES (BUFFALO)

decide which one of the three options in each flight is best to slather on your carbs. If you like shortcuts, then know this: The tangy herb and the sweet honey are tough to beat.



► NORTH DAKOTA AT UTAH

The tour of season-openers continues with another non-conference game between mismatched opponents. The Utes have won at least nine games three years running and have three straight bowl victories. This year they'll roll out a new no-huddle offense from first-year coordinator Troy Taylor and feature defensive tackle Lowell Lotulelei (93, left), younger brother of Panthers defensive tackle Star Lotulelei; he has NFL written all over him.

Now it's time to drive. It's eight hours to Denver, where you'll need to be by Friday. Get moving; the mountain roads should be more forgiving than they are in winter-time, but Eisenhower Pass is still a beast.

► COLORADO STATE VS. COLORADO IN DENVER

The Buffs are coming off a resurgent season in 2016, but their offseason has been marred by scandal. They'll certainly be ready to get back to football. The Rocky Mountain Showdown is played every year in the Broncos' stadium, and it's always a fun atmosphere. Plus, it's been a back-and-forth series in recent years; neither team has won more than two games straight since Colorado from 2003–05.

Grab a beer at one of the many craft breweries downtown before or after—or before *and* after—the game. Falling Rock Tap House has a massive selection of local drafts and a grilled cheese that's simple and amazing.

Get on the road by 9 a.m. Sunday. You've got a mind-numbing seven-hour run to Manhattan, Kans., plus you lose an hour as you head east. Download some podcasts; there won't be much in the way of scenery once the mountains disappear from your rearview mirror.



SATURDAY, SEPT. 2

CENTRAL ARKANSAS AT KANSAS STATE

6:10 P.M. CDT

Bill Snyder's Wildcats closed out 2016 with a 33-28 victory over Texas A&M in the Texas Bowl, and Kansas State starts this season ranked 19th in SI's Top 25. Get to Manhattan early enough to check out the tailgating scene around Bill Snyder Family Stadium. Once the game starts, maybe you'll witness a rarity—a pick thrown by senior QB Jesse Ertz. He holds the K-State record for lowest career interception rate, at 1.52%.

Stick around in the Little Apple to grab lunch and ice cream at the Call Hall Dairy Bar on campus, which is part of the Animal Sciences and Industry department. On the eight-hour trip to Laramie, Wyo., take the northern route along I-80 and detour through Omaha and Lincoln. Check out Scotts Bluff National Monument, a park along the North Platte River that was a stop on the Oregon Trail.



With dismal performances in the playoff and in the NFL, the league must address the issue at the top again.

BIG TROUBLE



... draft, the Big 12's days as a true power are long gone. To become root of its existential crisis: the talent problem **BY ANDY STAPLES**

BLE IN THE BIG



BIG 12 COMMISSIONER Bob Bowlsby has spent the entirety of his five-year tenure playing defense, which makes him the diametric opposite of most of his league's football teams.

What, no rim shot?

O.K., that's the kind of cheap stereotype Bowlsby has railed against, but his is the league that gave us Oklahoma 66, Texas Tech 59 in a game that featured 1,708 total yards last October. It gave us the highest average yards per play allowed (5.7) among Power Five leagues over the past five seasons. It gave us the highest average points per game allowed (29.4) among Power Five leagues over the past five seasons. If the shootout fits, the Big 12 has to wear it.

Before this year, Bowlsby has spent more time refuting the notion that the league's membership (only 10 schools) and

media-rights deals (once the ACC Network launches in 2019, the Big 12 will be the only Power Five league without its own cable network) will force it to eventually dissolve. Bowlsby's defense is reasoned and accurate. The Big 12 distributed at least \$34 million to each member school this past school year, and that doesn't count money schools made from the third-tier games they get to sell for themselves instead of handing them over to the conference to program a cable channel. The league is healthier fi-



PUBLIC DEFENDER

The Big 12's loudest cheerleader, Bowlsby has pushed back against those who say the league's membership and media-rights deals will prevent it from thriving.

nancially than the Pac-12, which tried to take half the Big 12's teams in the summer of 2010, and it is at least as healthy as the ACC. The Big 12 may have tried to blow itself up during college athletics' major changes in recent summers, but it somehow wound up stronger on the balance sheet.

The product of a mid-1990s shotgun marriage between the Big Eight and what was left of the Southwest Conference, the Big 12 has seemed on the precipice of collapse for much of its history. But earlier existential threats came from the boardroom. The issue that must get fixed before it rips the conference apart lies somewhere else: the football field. "We finished in the top four in the country in 18 sports," Bowlsby says. "But we're here to talk about football, and we didn't make the College Football Playoff. Obviously, that's the coin of the realm at this point."

Missing the dance twice in the three years the CFP has existed is but a symptom. The Big 12 has hired consultants and taken steps to address the underlying issue. In December, for instance, the league will bring back its football championship game to provide the "13th data point" Big 12 leaders believe the playoff selection committee craves. But the problem goes much deeper. Simply put, the Big 12 needs better football players—and it needs them now.

EVERY LEAGUE in the country would like to be in business with cash cows Oklahoma and Texas, who will be free agents again when the Big 12's grant of rights expires with its media rights deal in the spring of 2025. The Sooners and the Longhorns are hardly suffering in the Big 12 as currently constituted. As Bowlsby often points out, no athletic department makes more money from TV than Texas, which has its own ESPN-run network. The two schools effectively control the Big 12 because without them, it's not a power conference. But if the Big 12's champion keeps getting left out of the playoff, those two desirable commodities may seek better fortunes elsewhere. What would make them stay? A league that routinely puts teams in the playoff. To do that, Big 12 athletic directors and football coaches must solve a chicken-and-egg conundrum.

By the two best measures—NFL draft results (chicken) and recruiting rankings (egg)—the Big 12's players lag behind those in the other Power Five leagues. In the past five recruiting classes, only two Big 12 schools (Oklahoma at No. 8 in 2017 and Texas at No. 10 in '15) cracked the top 10 of the team rankings in the 247Sports.com composite. Alabama and Ohio State, which have made the playoff thrice and twice, respectively, cracked the top five every year. Texas and Oklahoma used to appear much more frequently. Rivals.com began ranking recruiting classes in '02, and either Texas, Oklahoma or both

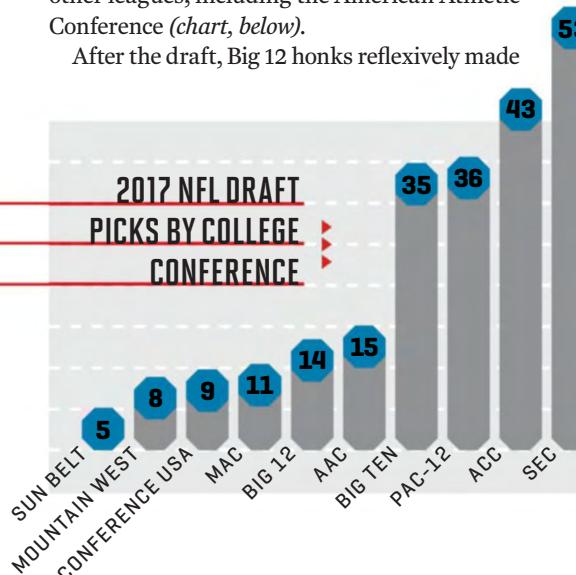


appeared in the top 10 every year until '12. Don't trust recruiting rankings? Then consider the numbers that influence those top-ranked recruits more than anything else: NFL draft data.

NFL talent evaluators don't care about conference or school affiliation. If a guy can play, they say, they want him. But judging by the numbers from the most recent draft, those people wanted little to do with the Big 12, which had 14 players drafted. This number lagged behind five other leagues, including the American Athletic Conference (chart, below).

After the draft, Big 12 honks reflexively made

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (MAYFIELD); DENNIS MEDLEY/THE USA TODAY SPORTS NETWORK





THE BIG 12

UNDER SIEGE

The struggles of Baker Mayfield and the Sooners against nonconference foes like Houston have hurt the Big 12's image, as has the scarcity of top picks like Patrick Mahomes.

ficult. It's a vicious cycle that can only be broken by coaches recruiting better players, developing those players more effectively and winning more crucial out-of-conference games. (It's not healthy for the league's image when its best team gets drilled at home by Ohio State and beaten at a neutral site by Houston. That's what happened to Oklahoma last year.)

The Big 12 doesn't only produce the fewest NFL draftees of the Power Five leagues. The conference also has the lowest drafted players of the five. In the past five drafts, the median draft position for a Big 12 player is 140. That's 12.5 spots below the ACC, 21.5 spots below the Pac-12, 32.5 spots below the SEC and 34 spots below the Big Ten. When coaches from schools in those conferences recruit against coaches from Big 12 schools, they can attach dollar amounts to how much a player stands to lose by playing in the Power Five league the NFL clearly respects the least. "It's different for every guy, but it doesn't hurt when you look at the hard facts," says Texas A&M coach Kevin Sumlin in response to a question about how the SEC's brand has changed the Aggies' recruiting. Texas A&M and Missouri left the Big 12 for the SEC after the 2011 season, and since joining their new league they've

▼▼▼ A CHAMPIONSHIP GAME WILL PROVIDE A "13TH DATA POINT," BUT WHAT THE BIG 12 REALLY NEEDS IS BETTER PLAYERS.

the excuse that a 10-team league would naturally have the fewest draft choices. Anyone with a calculator could see that they were full of it. The Big 12's 1.4 players drafted per team was far behind the fourth-place Big Ten (2.5).

The next excuse, that everything is cyclical, seemed more valid. (A year earlier, the Big 12 had tied for fourth with the ACC with 26 players drafted.) But an examination of the five drafts that have taken place since the Big 12 settled on its current lineup shows that the issues go much deeper than one down year in the league. The conference needs to improve its football product. If Big 12 teams can't produce more and better NFL draftees on a more consistent basis, schools from other leagues will continue to raid the Big 12 footprint for the best recruits, and making the playoff will get even more dif-

combined to produce 33 NFL draft picks with a median selection position of 70.5. The 10 Big 12 schools have produced 103 draftees in the same period.

The oldest of those former Missouri and Texas A&M players signed up to play in the Big 12. They didn't magically become better players when their schools joined the SEC. But they did benefit from playing against more varied styles of offenses and defenses, as well as from facing other players NFL teams liked.

The style of play in the Big 12 is a key reason the league struggles to produce NFL players. Mike Leach brought the Air Raid to the league as Oklahoma's offensive coordinator in 1999, and then he used the spread-out, up-tempo, pass-happy offense to turn Texas Tech into a consistent winner as the Red Raiders' head coach from 2000 through '09. Different up-tempo offenses have proliferated across the country, but no other league has been as homogenous as the Big 12. Leach has since moved on to Washington State, but his disciples rule the Big 12's offenses. His former lieutenant



Dana Holgorsen is West Virginia's head coach. Lincoln Riley, who went from walk-on quarterback to student assistant to receivers coach under Leach, was named Oklahoma's head coach after Bob Stoops retired in June. Oklahoma State runs an offense derived from the one Holgorsen brought to Stillwater in '10. Doug Meacham, who worked at Oklahoma State during that time before moving to TCU, is the new offensive coordinator at Kansas. One Leach-era Texas Tech quarterback (Kliff Kingsbury) is the head coach of the Red Raiders. Another (Sonny Cumbie) runs TCU's offense. Until this year, Baylor ran a cousin of the Leach offense developed by since-fired coach Art Briles. Texas ran a Briles copycat offense last season. Kansas State, coached by 77-year-old Bill Snyder, dares to be different by staying true to what was conventional 20 years ago. When TCU entered the league in '12, coach Gary Patterson tried a pro-



style offense. After two lackluster seasons, he scrapped it in favor of the Air Raid, and the '14 Horned Frogs went 12-1.

The preferred offense in the league favors tempo over strategy and works to exploit one-on-one matchups in the passing game and a numbers advantage in the running game. Offenses thrive on run-pass option plays that allow the quarterback to decide whether to run or to throw after the snap. This flummoxes defenses and makes blocking easier because lines typically will block the run (usually a simple zone play) no matter what the quarterback does. Unfortunately for the linemen, they often begin these plays in a two-point stance. The scheme can work even if the linemen don't master the finer points of pass blocking,

BEARING DOWN

Coach Rhule will implement a new offensive philosophy at Baylor that could become a model for other Big 12 teams.

and they don't usually have to fire out of a three-point stance to open a hole for a back. In their offenses, the hole often exists because the defense spreads itself too thin.

But in the NFL, linemen must make the hole. "You're drafting a guy coming out of some colleges that haven't been in a three-point stance since high school," Arizona Cardinals coach Bruce Arians said at last year's NFL combine. "You have to teach him to get in a three-point stance and run-block. The athletes are much better, but the fundamentals are worse than they've ever been."

The Texas and Oklahoma high schools that supply much of the Big 12's talent also overwhelmingly use up-tempo spread schemes. Big 12 coaches have adjusted by running schemes their players can master quickly. That helps in the short term, but it has become a key recruiting point for coaches from other leagues when they enter Big 12

territory. The median Big 12 draft position for offensive linemen is 164. That's 46.5 spots below the Pac-12, 53 spots below the ACC, 62 spots below the SEC and 78 spots below the Big Ten. Given those numbers, is it any wonder the top-ranked offensive tackle recruit in Texas in 2017 (Walker Little of Bellaire) signed with Stanford and the next-highest-ranked tackle (Austin Deculus of Cypress) signed with LSU?

Patterson can find all the speed he needs in Texas and Louisiana, but recently he has begun to scour the country to bring bigger bodies to TCU. Last February, the Horned Frogs signed a defensive tackle from Fort Lauderdale and a guard from Tacoma, Wash. In the class of 2018, TCU has a verbal commitment from an offensive tackle who grew up in Illinois and plays for a junior college in Iowa.

Defensive backs in the Big 12 also lag far behind their Power Five counterparts, probably because the best athletes in the league are turned into receivers. In the past five years, the median draft position for a Big 12 DB was 141. That's 28 spots behind the ACC, 30 spots behind the Pac-12, 30.5 behind the Big Ten and 72 behind the SEC.

If LSU, Ohio State and Texas are all trying to recruit a cornerback or safety from the Dallas area, those numbers most likely will get Texas crossed off the list. In this past recruiting cycle, the top-ranked DB in Texas (Jeffrey Okudah of Grand Prairie) signed with Ohio State, and the next highest ranked (Kary Vincent of Port Arthur) signed with LSU.

MORE BIG 12 SCHOOLS NEED TO REALIZE THAT IT ISN'T IMPOSSIBLE TO WIN GAMES AND PUT PLAYERS IN THE NFL AT THE SAME TIME.

It isn't impossible to win games and put players in the NFL in the Big 12. Oklahoma has won or shared seven of the past 11 Big 12 titles. It's been the league's lone representative in the CFP. And in the past five drafts, 23 Sooners have been picked at a median position of 115. Riley has ammunition when coaches from other leagues bash the Big 12 to sway recruits away from Norman. Riley also has pivoted somewhat from the pure Air Raid to take advantage of a wealth of backs and athletic offensive linemen. Oklahoma likes to run downhill, and that helps the Sooners win games and get players ready for the NFL. "We want to prepare them for that next step. That's part of our job," Riley says. "If you look at what we do schematically, a lot of it fits with what's being done in the NFL."

ONE COACH knows what it's like to dip into the Big 12's backyard and take the best recruits elsewhere: new Texas head coach—and former Ohio State offensive coordinator—Tom Herman. "When I came down here and signed J.T. Barrett and Dontre Wilson and Demetrius Knox and Mike Mitchell," he says, "I think that was a little bit different than what had been done in the past in Texas. Especially when Texas is down, other schools smell blood in the water a little bit."

Herman was hired last November to reverse a Texas slide that dates back to the end of the Mack Brown era. Since playing for the national title in 2009, the Longhorns have gone 46–42. They have had 13 players selected in the past five drafts. The median draft position (96) is better than most of the league, but the Longhorns haven't had an offensive lineman taken since '08, and their numbers don't compare favorably to other storied programs'. In the past five drafts, Alabama has produced 41 draftees (median position 55), Ohio State has produced 33 draftees (median position 59) and Florida State has produced 35 draftees (median position 78). Herman disagrees with

DRAFTEES THE PAST FIVE YEARS AND MEDIAN DRAFT POSITION



the notion that league or team affiliation can hurt a player in the draft. "It is irrelevant what conference you played in. It is irrelevant what school you went to," he says. "We've got to do a better job recruiting and developing our talent." Herman is working on the chicken at practice, and he seems to be improving the egg on the recruiting trail. Texas currently has oral commitments from four of the five highest-ranked recruits in the Lone Star State for the class of '18.

Herman and new Baylor coach Matt Rhule will try to succeed without running a version of the Air Raid or the Briles offense. Rhule will adjust his offense to take advantage of the speed he inherited, but he hopes a slow tempo will keep his defense off the field. Herman, also a former Iowa State offensive coordinator, likes to run at a fast pace, but his offense uses many of the same single-wing principles as former boss Urban Meyer's offense at Ohio State. His

linemen must know how to open holes. It helps that predecessor Charlie Strong, while unsuccessful on the field, did help restock the talent base. Junior offensive tackle Connor Williams, for example, should snap that offensive line draft streak if he goes pro after this season.

A common trope is that a successful Texas will cure the Big 12's ills. At a gathering earlier this year, a Big 12 athletic director pointed at a sign with the word LONGHORN. "We really need them to be good," the AD said. Herman has heard this, but he has enough on his plate without worrying about trying to save an entire conference. "Texas needing to be good is not *the* problem," says Herman.

The problem is that the Big 12 needs better players. Whether it's Herman, Rhule, Riley, Patterson or someone else, coaches in the league need to recruit better on the front end and develop players better once they arrive on campus. That, not a 13th data point, will get the Big 12 into the playoff and national title conversations. It needs to happen, and soon. Otherwise, the Big 12 might just score itself into oblivion. □

Week 2



SATURDAY, SEPT. 9

GARDNER- WEBB AT WYOMING

TBD

OR

*Western State
Colorado at
Adams State*

2 P.M. MT

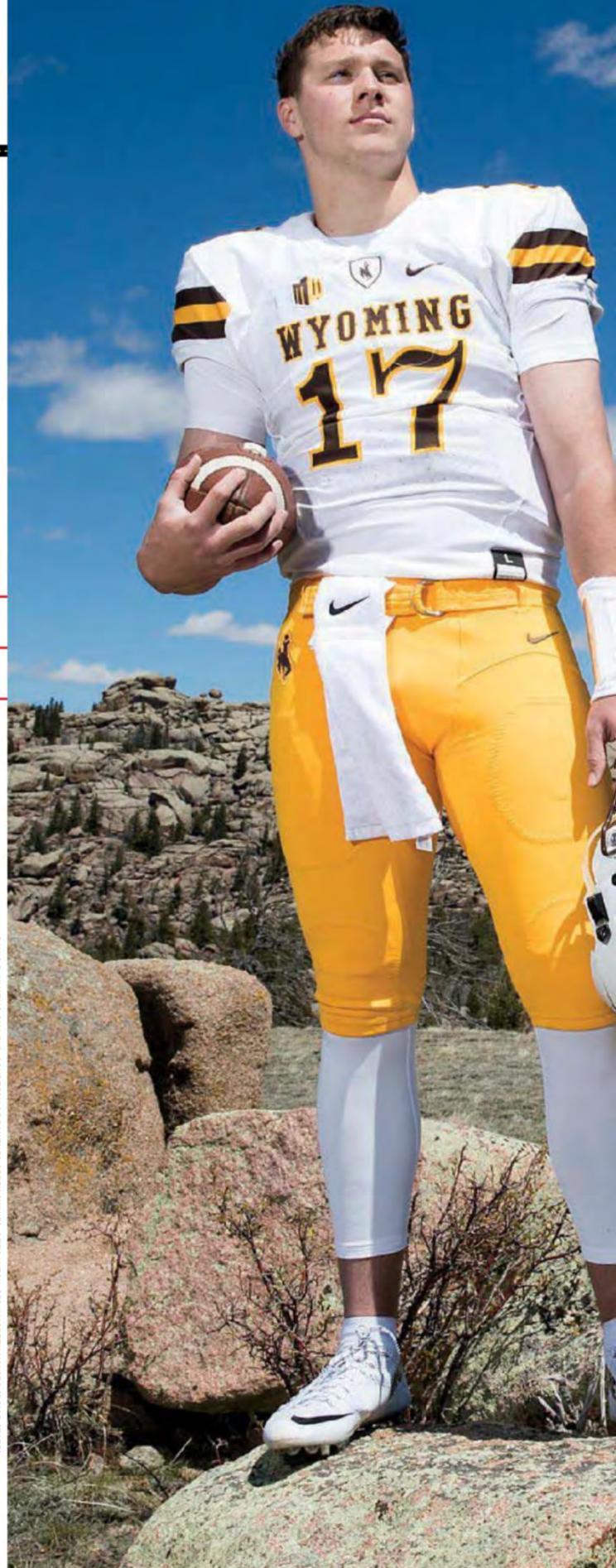
next Carson Wentz, who also played for Bohl, so don't miss an opportunity to see him. The Gardner-Webb game comes on the heels of Wyoming's nonconference matchup at Iowa on Sept. 2; if the Cowboys win in Iowa City, the Allen hype machine will be in high gear.

As an alternate, head to rural Colorado to catch a glimpse of the first woman to receive a scholarship to play college football: Adams State kicker Becca Longo. It's unclear if Longo will see playing time at the D-II school—there are two more experienced kickers on the roster—but if it's looking like she might, this diversion might be worth the trip. It's also a way to hit all three divisions during the trip.

After either game, you have the good part of a week to spend in the Wild West. It's about 10 hours from Laramie (13½ from Alamosa) to Boise, so split up the drive. First, head six hours northwest along I-80 and U.S. 191 to Jackson Hole and Yellowstone National Park. Then make your way 4½ hours west to picturesque Sun Valley, Idaho.

THIS WILL BE coach Craig Bohl's fourth season with the Cowboys, and over that time he's been adamant that Laramie isn't a stopover on his way to somewhere else. Bohl won three straight FCS championships at North Dakota State before taking over a Wyoming team coming off two seasons in which they won a total of nine games. The turnaround has taken time. The Cowboys won four games in Bohl's first season and two in his second, but last year, behind super sophomore quarterback Josh Allen, they won eight and appeared in the Poinsettia Bowl (which they lost 24–21 to BYU). Allen could be the

DAVID E. KLUTHO (ALLEN); COURTESY OF PANTHER CREEK (WINE); OTTO KITSINGER (BOISE STATE)



Week 3



THURSDAY, SEPT. 14

NEW MEXICO AT BOISE ST.



6:00 P.M. MT

SATURDAY, SEPT. 16

*Oregon St. at
Washington St.*

2:30 P.M. PDT

WHAT WOULD ANY exploration of college football be without a stop at the blue field of Boise? The teams of the Mountain West are catching up to Boise State, but the Broncos remain strong and New Mexico should pose little challenge. Keep an eye on junior quarterback Brett Rypien—nephew of former Redskins QB Mark—who's thrown 44 touchdowns over his career. The next day,

make the six-hour drive north to Pullman, Wash. To the east of your route is a swath of national forests; stop and smell the conifers.

► OREGON STATE AT WASHINGTON STATE

This brings us to our first conference matchup, a Pac-12 showdown that includes SI's preseason No. 22, Washington State. This game may also feature the most memorably massive player you'll see this season: Cougars left guard Cody O'Connell, who stands 6' 8" and weighs 368 pounds. Last year he became the second unanimous All-America in Washington State history. He'll be a name to watch in next spring's NFL draft, as will that of Cougars quarterback Luke Falk.

From here, you have one of your longest drives of the trip, but you have a week to get to Minneapolis. Start out with the nine-hour leg back to Yellowstone, and stay there a night or two. Go an hour north to the scenic Big Sky country of Montana for another night, then trek another nine hours east to Mount Rushmore. From there, motor nine hours across South Dakota to Minneapolis. Get in a few days early and enjoy the city. Jog around Lake Calhoun, and check out the Surly Brewery. Catch a show at First Avenue, the venue Prince made famous, and be sure to eat a Jucy Lucy, the cheese-stuffed hamburgers many bars and restaurants feature. The Blue Door Pub and the 5-8 Club make two of the best.



PANTHER CREEK PINOT NOIR

Dundee, Ore.

East of the Rockies, pinot noir from Oregon's Willamette Valley can be scarce and sometimes pricy.

But in the Pacific Northwest, the stuff is everywhere. A trip to a grocery store and about \$20 will land a bottle of the silky, fruit-forward [think plums and dark cherries] elixir. It pairs with steak or seafood or a burger—or nothing at all. On second thought, better get two bottles.





Week 4



SATURDAY, SEPT. 23

ST. JOHN'S VS. ST. THOMAS

1:00 P.M. CDT

THIS DIVISION III RIVALRY—known as the Tommies versus the Johnnies—is one of the best in college football, and the 2017 edition will be the first football game of any kind played at the Twins' stadium, Target Field, which opened in 2010. St. Thomas is down the street in St. Paul, and St. John's is a little more than an hour northwest of the Twin Cities. The teams have met 86 times since their rivalry began in 1901. Both draw

well, and they're expecting to break the unofficial attendance record for a D-III game (there is no official record) of 17,535, which was set in 2016 in a game between Wisconsin-Oshkosh and Wisconsin-Whitewater. This one promises to be a thrill for those seeking the purity of ye olde game: no scholarships, no national-TV cameras, no football-player-only dorms, no leaving early for the draft. It's just two teams filled with mostly local kids pounding away for bragging rights.

Spend a few more days in Minneapolis, or perhaps take a trip north to one of the 10,000 lakes. When you're ready, head 4½ hours south of the Twin Cities to Dyersville, Iowa, to catch the Field of Dreams, site of the 1989 classic baseball film. Then, it's 2½ hours west to Ames.

Week 5



THURSDAY, SEPT. 28

TEXAS AT IOWA STATE

TBD

SATURDAY, SEPT. 30

*Northwestern
at Wisconsin*

TBD

TOM HERMAN'S FIRST Big 12 game as Longhorns head coach comes on the heels of a massive matchup at USC the previous week. With two straight road games, Texas may be tired, and Iowa State, though hardly the cream of the conference, could be a trap. Still, the Longhorns should be stronger in 2017 with one of the most talented young coaches in the country bringing his passionate approach downstate after a successful run at Houston, and with quarterback Shane Buechele, who led all true freshmen in

'16 in passing yards with 2,958. Collin Johnson, a receiver who played a year ago as a true freshman, is also poised to elevate his game under the new staff. It won't hurt, either, that Buechele will have junior Connor Williams, one of the better left tackles in the game, protecting him.

This offseason, Iowa State embarked on an ambitious plan to turn its quarterback from last year, Joel Lanning, into a linebacker. The team had switched to junior Jacob Park under center in Week 9, but coaches believed Lanning was too good a football player to ride the bench. The solution: Transition the 6' 2", 235-pounder into a hard-hitting defender. It will be interesting to keep an eye on how he settles in.

Grab a meal at Olde Main Brewing Co. while you're in Ames, and then hit the road. Madison beckons, and it's only 4½ hours northwest.

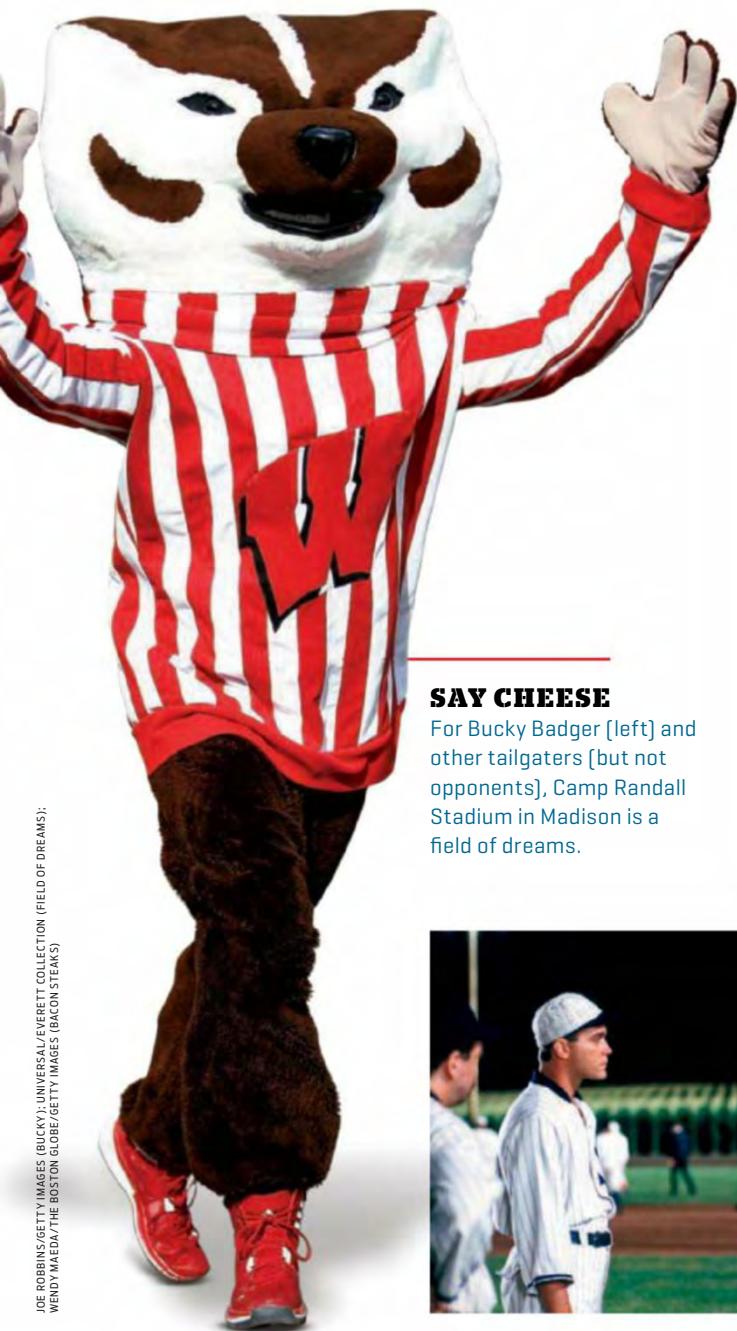


BACON STEAKS AT LASALLE KITCHEN AND TAVERN

South Bend, Ind.

Bacon has few weaknesses. Still, if we were forced to criticize the finest piece of the pig, it would be that the mass-produced version tends to be a little flimsy. Perhaps

this is because America's bacon producers don't seem to believe the general population can handle the pleasure a thick, juicy slab would provide. Perhaps they



SAY CHEESE

For Bucky Badger [left] and other tailgaters [but not opponents], Camp Randall Stadium in Madison is a field of dreams.

► NORTHWESTERN AT WISCONSIN

Get to Madison by lunchtime on Friday, and enjoy the afternoon with a meal and sightseeing around Lake Mendota or Lake Monona. Tour the beautiful capital building too. But rest up: Saturday will be a big day of football, and Camp Randall Stadium offers perhaps the most festive game-day atmosphere in the U.S.

Wisconsin's defense should be as good as it was a year ago, when it ranked No. 4 in points per game in the FBS. Senior linebacker Jack Cichy missed time after tearing a pectoral muscle against Iowa, but he was the most electric player on the defense in 2016, and he's back at full strength. The Wildcats' quarterback, Clayton Thorson, a junior, is going into his third season as a starter. He has improved from year to year, and threw for 3,182 yards, 22 touchdowns and nine interceptions in '16.

Make sure you pick up some Spotted Cow beer on your way out of Madison, and you can't leave without some cheese curds and burgers at Dotty Dumpling's Dowry near campus. From there, make the three-hour drive to Chicago. It's touristy, but the view from the Willis Tower can't be beat. The Chicago Architecture Foundation's boat tour is also a can't-miss activity before it shuts

down for the winter. Have hot dogs or Italian beef at Portillo's, and if you're a deep dish pizza person, make a stop at Pequod's. Try to get into chef Stephanie Izard's Girl & the Goat for dinner. The Cubs are out of town until Friday, which means you can go on the expanded tour of Wrigley Field, which includes a visit to the home dugout.

Then, head for Columbus. Stop at the 3 Floyd's Brewpub in Muster, Ind., on your way for the salt-baked pork belly sandwich.



JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES (BUCKY); UNIVERSAL/EVERETT COLLECTION (FIELD OF DREAMS);
WENDY MAEDA/THE BOSTON GLOBE/GETTY IMAGES (BACON STEAKS)



► worry that the resulting euphoria would cut nationwide productivity. The proprietors at Lasalle Kitchen and Tavern have no such concern. They serve bacon strips so thick that the "steak" descriptor is accurate. If you prefer

your bacon thin and crispy, you might change your mind after a few of these bricks. The slab develops the same delicious crust as thin bacon, but because it's so thick, it stays tender inside. That makes the bacon steak both crispy

and chewy. Usually bacon steaks are only available at steakhouses where dinner will set you back a few hundred bucks. But Lasalle's is reasonable, and because they love us, they're now serving the steaks with redeye gravy.

Week 6



SATURDAY, OCT. 7

MARYLAND AT OHIO ST.

TBD

The Big Ten portion of the tour continues at the Horseshoe, a stadium that packs a punch in both history and capacity. [It opened in 1922 and now seats nearly 105,000.] Tailgating is essential, but with parking spots at a premium, don't hesitate to participate without a car. Local vendors sell provisions outside the stadium, and there are plenty of friendly and generous fans with lavish tailgate setups. Get there early to attend the pregame Skull Session in nearby St. John Arena, where the Buckeye marching

band puts on a great show. Seating is first-come, first-serve.

As for the game, Ohio State will continue to be the machine it has been under Urban Meyer. Fifth-year senior quarterback J.T. Barrett drives the offense again, but when the D is on the field, pay attention to the rugby-style tackling it has helped bring to the vanguard.

Once the game is over, head east. The drive to Syracuse is seven hours, so break it up a bit, stopping in Canton, Ohio, at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Then head an hour north to Cleveland and check out the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. From there, it's another $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours to Niagara Falls, a must-see. Take in the view before setting out on the final $2\frac{1}{2}$ -hour leg to Syracuse.



MATTHEW EMMONS/USA TODAY SPORTS



MORE BANG FOR THE BUCKEYES

Ohio State is one of the many teams teaching their defenders to aim lower.

NEW TAKES ON TACKLING

Rules changes, safety concerns and spread offenses have forced coaches to rethink their approach to one of the most elemental facets of the game. Rugby, anyone?

BY ANDY STAPLES

Photograph by Khris Hale/Icon Sportswire/Getty Images

TACKLING

WASHINGTON DEFENSIVE coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski can rattle off the commands: *Head across. Eyes through the near number.*

The essential phrases for tackling that Kwiatkowski learned as a defensive lineman at Santa Barbara (Calif.) High and at Boise State in the 1980s share traits with the ideal takedown described six years ago by then Patriots linebacker Jerod Mayo, who played high school ball in Hampton, Va., and collegiately at Tennessee in the 2000s. “Eyes up, head across, bite the ball,” Mayo told SI. “Then bring your hips through and grab cloth in the back. That’s old-school, Pepper Johnson–style tackling.”

Mayo is recalling a technique that coaches like Kwiatkowski have spent the last decade trying to eliminate—not just because it puts the head and neck at risk, since they’re driven into the chest of a charging runner, but also because it left so much room for improvement. As the 1987 Big Sky Defensive Player of the Year, Kwiatkowski planted plenty of ballcarriers by planting his face into their near numbers; now he can’t believe he ever considered that the best approach. “It’s like wrestling,” he says. “If you’re going for a single-leg or a double-leg takedown, you don’t put your head on the guy’s thigh. You put your head to the side [of the leg] so you can get in deeper [with the shoulder].”

The game hasn’t given Kwiatkowski and his peers much choice but to evolve. Concerns over head injuries prompted the 2013 targeting rule that can get a tackler thrown out of a game for contacting a defenseless player above the shoulder or for leading with the crown of the helmet. Offensive schemes have also spread the field, which means missed tackles have a greater chance of turning into touchdowns.

But while the incentives for sound, effective tackling have never been greater, under a variety of recent safety rules players have less time than ever to practice in pads and master new techniques. That’s why Rocky Seto, a former USC and Seahawks assistant, wound up studying how rugby players tackle while working for Pete Carroll. It’s why Tennessee defensive coordinator Bob Shoop invented drills last season that would allow his banged-up defense to maintain some semblance of tackling fundamentals. It’s also why Baylor equipment director Jeff Barlow received new marching orders from first-year coach Matt Rhule: Go buy some robots.



DEFENSIVE COACHES are as passionate about their tackling methods as gumbo cooks are about their roux. And just as those chefs have definite ideas about the use of butter and flour, defensive coaches are adamant about the tackle’s key ingredients: where to make contact and how to bring down the ballcarrier.

All the coaches interviewed by SI agreed on one thing: Never lead with the head. Seto, who helped hone the rugby-style methods that have been adopted by several major college programs, believes that tackling changed for the worse in the late 1970s and early ’80s, after advances in design made helmets strong enough to protect the facial bones of headfirst hitters. While quizzing former players such as linebacker Dick Butkus, who retired in 1974, Seto found that self-preservation instincts had led players to go in with their shoulders before then. “As soon as the face masks improved, coaching techniques and principles changed,” Seto says. “Get your head across. See what you hit. Eyes to the ball. In essence, putting your head in the line of fire. That messed up the fundamentals of the game. The game was meant to be played with our shoulders and having good leverage. We got away from that for about 30 years. The game is correcting itself.”

Then, in the late 2000s, new medical data about the long-term dangers from head injuries encouraged coaches



the thigh, he wonders how a tackler can generate power while bending that low. "There's no game that anybody plays bent at the waist on their toes," Saban says.

Seto would politely demur, citing what Seahawks coaches call the hawk tackle—in which the defender hits the ballcarrier's thigh with a shoulder, grabs him and either spins him or powers him to the ground. Kwiatkowski teaches that series at Washington, and former Ohio State defensive coordinator Chris Ash talked Buckeyes coach Urban Meyer into adopting it before Ash left to take over at Rutgers. Seto had been trying to persuade the Seahawks to adopt shoulder tackling when a comment from a visitor from the University of Birmingham—not UAB, the one in the United Kingdom—earlier this decade led him to video clips of rugby tackles. Seto saw

players hitting ballcarriers hard enough to knock the breath from them, but the tacklers weren't launching themselves or leading with their heads. They had efficient leverage and their heads to the side of the contact zone. This was a

BAMA SLAMMAS

The Tide are among FBS's best tacklers, whether with head to the side [left] or across the body.

WHILE INCENTIVES FOR SOUND TACKLING HAVE NEVER BEEN GREATER, PLAYERS HAVE LESS TIME TO PRACTICE IN PADS.

to further rethink their approaches. Now, nearly everyone agrees that the tackler's shoulder should hit the ballcarrier first—just as it did in the days before seemingly indestructible face masks. What coaches can't agree upon is where that shoulder should land and what should happen next.

Alabama coach Nick Saban played defensive back at Kent State in the early 1970s, when tacklers mostly led with their shoulders. Saban has always taught defenders to track the near hip, plow a shoulder into the ballcarrier's near shoulder, wrap him up and drive him to the ground. This allows for a chest-high hit while keeping the head out of the tackle. The approach has proved remarkably effective. According to data tracked by Pro Football Focus, Bama has been the nation's second-most-efficient tackling team over the past three seasons, behind Air Force. The Crimson Tide had 1,845 tackles and 437 assists with only 273 missed tackles, well below the FBS average of 349.6 during that span. When Saban sees coaches teaching defenders to send their shoulders into



concept he could take to All-Pro DBs Kam Chancellor and Richard Sherman. "They have to really believe that this is going to help their career," Seto says. "Not just to make them safe, but to make them more effective."

The Seahawks bought his pitch and even released an instructional video on their rugby-style tackles before making a second straight run to the Super Bowl in 2014. The hawk drew the most media attention, but coaches

also took notes on the profile tackle (a shoulder-to-chest tackle, which Saban would prefer) and the compression tackle (a two-on-one tackling method, usually with a combination of a hawk and a profile).

By that point Kwiatkowski had already made his own rugby connection. He worked at Boise State when the NCAA implemented its harsher punishment for targeting. Knowing he wanted to help his players to aim lower and keep their heads to the side of the ballcarrier to avoid ejections, he called on a college buddy who belonged to the Snake River Rugby Club. He helped Boise State coaches understand the leverage involved in rugby tackling and showed them drills. Kwiatkowski and the rest of Chris Petersen's staff had moved to Washington by the time the Seahawks released their video, and they found themselves running on a parallel track with their local NFL team. "When we started doing this, we weren't sold on the fact that getting the head behind versus in front was going to be a more efficient tackle. But now we know," Kwiatkowski says. "When you shoulder punch and you get your foot in the ground and you tackle low, you're way more efficient at getting guys on the ground."

NO MATTER the technique, the challenge every FBS coach faces now is finding a way to teach it. In 2015, the Big 12 began limiting its teams to one full-contact practice a week during the season. Last year the Ivy League ceased full-contact practices altogether. This year the NCAA banned two-a-day practices. And sometimes coaches simply don't have enough healthy players to risk hitting much in practice. By mid-October, Tennessee's Shoop had lost four starters for the season and had three others sitting with injuries. "Our Achilles heel was giving up a lot of big plays," he says. "Some of them were because of missed tackles." So Shoop had his players drill more on their footwork and positioning, which can help solve issues that lead to extra yards. Lunging to hit from too far away, for instance, can cause a missed tackle just as often as a poor wrap-up or minimal leg drive.

Programs across the nation are seeking better ways to practice tackling without contact. One way is to treat tackling as they treat blocking. For decades offensive line coaches have obsessed over step length, step angle, head placement and hand placement—and they've learned to teach them all without contact drills. A reach block has a very specific set of instructions. So does a down block. On the other hand, tackles were often improvisational reactions to the ballcarrier's movement that drew from a

few basic tenets. "I don't care how he gets there," says Rex Norris, mimicking coaches he heard through the years. "I just want him to make the tackle." Then Norris pauses. "An offensive line coach would never say that [about a block]."

Norris was the coach at Kentwood (Wash.) High for 11 seasons before he left in 2015 to marry his first sporting love with his second. He had discovered rugby at Arizona State in the 1980s, and he had coached it at the youth level when he wasn't coaching football. Norris now serves as head of football at the ATAVUS rugby and football academy in Seattle, and he consults with high school, college and pro teams about the science of tackling. Working with Kwiatkowski and schools including Michigan State and Rutgers, Norris studies tackling data and video and helps coaches design prac-



tice plans that focus on the facets that need sharpening.

Norris and Seto agree that coaches can drill players on the finer points of tackling with no pads involved at all. Simply working on tracking the ballcarrier's near hip—as Alabama players do nearly every day—helps players be in far better position to make the tackle. Also, no contact is necessary to perform footwork drills that ensure the tackler's near foot is staggered in front so he can adjust if the ballcarrier changes direction. Kwiatkowski has a rule at his practices that tacklers are not allowed to "tag off" ballcarriers in noncontact situations. The defender must work through every step of the process until the point at which he would make contact.

Equipment innovations have also helped coaches drill technique without making players drill one another. Tack-



can wear full pads or just a helmet—to approach correctly and hit the proper strike zone.

Schools with a heftier budget can afford more advanced options. When Rhule arrived at Baylor from Temple, he wanted to teach his defenders to blast ballcarriers in the chest. “If you want to cause turnovers and knock people backward,” he says, “hitting them low doesn’t really do that.” So Rhule asked his equipment director, Barlow, to find a device that would allow the Bears to simulate a game-speed tackle.

Barlow called Baylor’s sales rep at dummy and blocking sled-maker Rogers Athletic. The rep recommended the MVP-DRIVE—the MVP standing for Mobile Virtual Player—based on a device pioneered at Dartmouth, where coach Buddy Teevens banned live tackling in practice in 2010. He ultimately replaced human ballcarriers in some tackling drills with a self-righting, motorized dummy designed by students in the school’s engineering program. Now Rogers has similar devices on the practice fields at Texas, Notre Dame and Georgia, and in NFL camps.

Baylor received its first MVP-DRIVE shortly before camp opened this month. The 190-pound dummy (retail price: \$8,295) can cover 40 yards in seven seconds, and it can spin 360 degrees to evade a tackler—if the coach or manager handling

MIND THE HEAD

Washington defenders work on leading with the shoulder, à la the helmetless players of Australian rugby.

►►► EQUIPMENT INNOVATIONS HAVE HELPED COACHES DRILL TECHNIQUE WITHOUT MAKING PLAYERS DRILL ONE ANOTHER.

ling dummies still exist, but new products are available at every price point. One of the simplest is the Tackle Wheel, a foam donut as tall as five feet that a coach can roll down the yardline. Hawk tacklers work on shoulder-to-thigh contact by hitting it, then practice spinning the donut to the ground as they would a ballcarrier.

The Shadowman, meanwhile, is a dummy with clearly marked strike zones for the chest and thighs. It sits inside a rubber ring that slides along the ground and has a harness attached. As a coach pulls the ring, the tackler must track the moving dummy, hit it with the proper shoulder and drive it in the right direction. A solid hit will pop the dummy off the ring and onto the ground. The Shadowman doesn’t offer the resistance of a real ballcarrier, but it does force the tackler—who

the remote control has been practicing. “The players look at it like a pop-up dummy,” Barlow says. “All of a sudden they see it moving and their eyes get wide.” Bears coaches plan to use the battery-powered dummy as a kickoff returner, which would allow coverage team members a rare out-of-game opportunity to make a tackle on that play. The MVP-DRIVE can play other positions as well. “You can use it as a receiver, and a DB reacts off of it,” Barlow says. “It can break on a post. It can do a corner route. It can do a straight go route. That thing hauls butt.”

Whether a team uses a robot, a foam dummy or non-contact drills, the goal remains the same: Execute one of football’s two fundamentals. The team that figures out how to do that in the safest, most efficient manner could rule the sport. □

Week 7



FRIDAY, OCT. 13

CLEMSON AT SYRACUSE

7:00 P.M. EDT

Watch the defending champs take on Dino Babers's high-powered offense in the Dome.

OR SATURDAY, OCT. 14

N.C. State at Pitt,

TBD

Catch the start of the Max Browne era at Pitt. The former Trojan's new team is coming off an 8-5 season, including wins over Penn State and Clemson, so expectations are high. Browne (right) will face perhaps his toughest test of the season against N.C. State's veteran defense, so this one should be fun.

Postgame, you have a full week to explore Appalachia. Breaks Interstate Park at the Virginia-Kentucky line has a massive gorge that has been called the Grand Canyon of the South. Then head to Washington, D.C., to see the sights. From there, it's four hours to State College, Pa.





COLLEGE FOOTBALL
PREVIEW

PRO MOTION

The grad-transfer rule is about giving athletes academic options. But it's brought an NFL wrinkle to the FBS: player moves that look a lot like free agency

BY JOAN NIESEN

LAST JAN. 2, as USC and Penn State faced off in one of the best games in Rose Bowl history, the quarterback who had started the Trojans' first three games of the 2016 season watched from his parents' couch in Sammamish, Wash. He was cheering for USC, by then his former team, for two distinct reasons: He wanted his old buddies to win—and Penn State was about to become one of his biggest rivals. Not three weeks before USC's 52–49 comeback victory, Max Browne announced that he would play for Pittsburgh in 2017.

Browne had graduated from USC in the fall of 2015 and had already begun working toward his M.B.A. He had ridden the bench for three seasons, one as a redshirt, before winning the starting job in the spring and summer of 2016. But after a 1–2 start in which he completed 63.2% of his passes and threw two interceptions, Browne lost his job to freshman Sam Darnold. Browne appeared sporadically afterward, but with four games left in the season, he decided he wanted a fresh start.

With the help of his older brother, Mitch, who had played quarterback at Claremont McKenna College, Browne listed nearly every FBS program on a whiteboard and then erased the ones that had no pressing need at quarterback. Eventually the brothers whittled the list to five schools. Pitt stood out thanks to its recent success with QB Nathan Peterman. Like Browne, Peterman had graduated from his original school, Tennessee, which meant he was immediately eligible to play when he left Knoxville after the 2014 season. (According to NCAA rules, nongraduate transfers must sit

out a year. In addition virtually all conferences dictate that in-conference transfers sit and also lose a year of eligibility.) Over the next two seasons at Pitt, Peterman completed 61.1% of his passes for 5,142 yards, 45 touchdowns and 15 interceptions, and last spring the Bills made him a fifth-round draft pick. Like Browne, Peterman had ridden the bench at his first stop—he attempted 43 passes over two years with the Vols—yet he'd blossomed under more favorable circumstances.

Browne reached out to Pitt and was invited for a visit. Several phone calls later he was a Panther, and he's expected to lead Pitt against Youngstown State on Sept. 2. Browne is one of dozens of graduate transfers who will play this fall at new schools without sitting out a single game. Some moved on because they lost their jobs. Others took chances to play at bigger-name programs in hope of boosting their NFL draft stock. Another group followed old coaches to new schools. Few, though, will find themselves in new territory for the reasons the NCAA intended when it began permitting graduate transfers to be immediately eligible 11 years ago.

OVER THE past decade and a half, the number of graduate students playing college football has soared. An increasing number of players come to college with advanced-placement credits, redshirt and take summer school classes. As a result, many earn diplomas before their eligibility expires. This allows players to earn graduate degrees while still playing—or, looked at another way, they're forced into grad school if they want to keep playing football. From 2007 to '14, the percentage of graduate students competing in NCAA football almost doubled, going from 2.0% of the total (384 players) to 3.8% (803).

The NCAA got involved in graduate transfers in April 2006, when it ruled that a college athlete who'd graduated but had remaining eligibility could transfer without sitting out a season in order to pursue a graduate degree his or her school did not offer or to attend a school that provided a better academic opportunity. The rule was designed to enhance a player's academic options, but its language is muddled. These students enroll as postgraduate students without *transferring* a single credit.

The NCAA's intentions seemed pure. Imagine Joe C. Football-Player, a physics major at Missouri with a slim shot at the NFL. He decides that if he can't play football, he wants to pursue a master's in mechanical engineering, which Mizzou doesn't offer. So he applies to programs around the country. He's accepted at, say, Purdue, and since he has already graduated, he's free to set off for Indiana and start work on his graduate degree. But Purdue also has a football team, and Joe still has a year of eligibility remaining. Normally he'd have to sit



out a year to play football at another school, but as this is an academic decision, the grad-transfer rule allows him to play immediately. Likewise, if Joe went to Alabama to play football but gets into the M.B.A. program at Northwestern or Stanford, he can take that academic opportunity without sitting for a year.

Until 2011, when an N.C. State quarterback named Russell Wilson hopped to Wisconsin to play out his final year of eligibility, the grad-transfer rule existed on the periphery of men's revenue sports, and it largely worked the way it was intended. The future Seahawks quarterback was one of just 17 football players who used the graduate-transfer provision that season. (That same year 53 track athletes competed as grad transfers.) Since Wilson, though, the practice has exploded, culminating in 117 graduate transfers playing Division I football in 2016. That's a 588% increase in six seasons. In the face of that onslaught, the NCAA has allowed the practice to drift from its original intentions. No longer does a player need to enroll in a graduate program his prior school failed to offer; that's how Browne could transfer from USC's M.B.A. program to Pitt's without a hitch.

"In most cases, these aren't academic decisions," Penn State coach James Franklin says. "I think that's the challenge. We put things in place, but they really morph over time into being something that they're not. I don't think it's working in a way that it was intended."

According to the NCAA, of the graduate transfers who played football in 2013 and '14, 55% failed to complete their graduate study, compared with 56% in men's basketball, 42% in baseball and 16% in women's volleyball. The correlation is obvious: The higher the revenue and prominence of the sport, the lower the graduate-school



MIXED SIGNALS

Sokol [19] left Iowa for La. Tech after losing his job to Rudock [15], who was then replaced by Beathard [16].

completion rate, suggesting that many players are switching schools for athletic, not academic, opportunities.

These factors have combined to make graduate transfers a hot topic among college football's decision makers. Critics of how it's evolved include Kentucky's Mark Stoops and Alabama's Nick Saban. "I'm not for having free agency in our conference," Saban said of the provision in May. Others, like Pitt's Pat Narduzzi, see benefits if it's done with the intent

WHEN SKIP HOLTZ took over as Louisiana Tech's coach in 2013, he inherited a roster with two quarterbacks on scholarship. That fall he started freshman Ryan Higgins, who threw six touchdowns to go along with 13 interceptions as the team went 4–8. After the season, Higgins's backup, Scotty Young, quit football. Holtz was stuck. He wanted to let Higgins learn from the sideline, but now that wasn't an option. Enter Cody Sokol, who had lost a quarterback battle with Jake Rudock at Iowa. Sokol had graduated and was in the market for a transfer.

Sokol got connected with Tech through one of its assistants, entered a graduate psychology program, and in 2014 he led the Bulldogs to a 9–5 season. (Rudock, meanwhile, would lose the Hawkeyes' job to C.J. Beathard in '14 and leave for Michigan as a graduate transfer, completing a

GRADUATE TRANSFERS ARE A HOT TOPIC. "I'M NOT FOR HAVING FREE AGENCY IN OUR CONFERENCE," SABAN SAYS.

of giving a player a chance, be it in school or football. In his three seasons at Pitt he has had two high-profile quarterbacks, but they reached out to the Panthers, not the other way around. "It can go too far, where people are recruiting grad transfers now," he says. "People have a recruiting office where that's their sole duty; they have three guys that are focused on, *O.K., who are the possible transfers around the country, even I-AA.*"

Some supporters, like Purdue's first-year coach Jeff Brohm, also use the same wording as Saban. In July, Brohm, who brought in five graduate transfers this spring, referred to his newcomers as "so-called free agents," stating it more as a fact than a criticism. Lovie Smith, who moved from the NFL to Illinois in 2016 and elected to be judicious with graduate transfers in his rebuild, takes no issue with that wording. "We talk about the college athlete getting his degree, right?" Smith asks rhetorically. "There should be some benefits, right? This is a graduate guy. He's gone to college, done everything he's supposed to do, and he's graduated. Why shouldn't he have a couple of options?"

That spectrum of opinions hints at the question that lies at the heart of the debate: Should the standard rules apply to all college football players, or should earning a degree give a player free rein to play at any school that will have him?

head-spinning series of transactions that provides fodder for critics.) The next year, Holtz learned through mutual friends that Florida quarterback Jeff Driskel was looking to follow the same path Sokol had. In '15, Driskel joined the M.B.A. program at Louisiana Tech and led Holtz's team to a 9–4 record. Finally, in '16, Higgins got his job back, and he too led the Bulldogs to nine wins. "It's not something that I got into and said, Oh, let's go this route [forever]," Holtz says. "It was based more on need and the situation that we walked into. If we do what we're supposed to do, recruit the freshmen and develop them, then [grad transfers] are only for injuries or emergency situations."

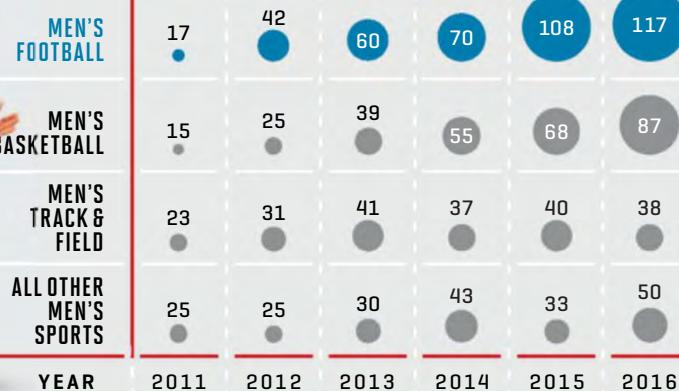
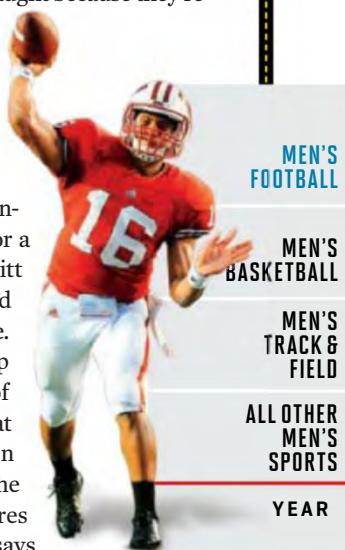
Holtz simplified his offense under Sokol and Driskel, especially at the beginnings of their respective seasons. Brohm says he feels better if he can get a grad transfer in for the summer session; those reps can give a transfer a nice head start. Rutgers coach Chris Ash, who's bringing in Louisville grad-transfer quarterback Kyle Bolin this fall, is realistic, though, about the progress a team can make in molding a player in a few short months. "If you can get a great player, you take him, and that's your system," he says. "Everyone wants to say, *Here's my system.* Well, your system is what your players can do, and if you get a great player, you've got to fit your system around what he can do."

That's especially true in the case of quarterbacks, who tend to dominate the graduate-transfer conversation because losing the starting job at your original school can be a death sentence in terms of reps. Even among players

at other positions, the most common reason for switching uniforms is the same: to play more and get a better shot at the NFL. Still, instances of such elevation are rare; of the 397 graduate transfers who played FBS football from 2012 through '16, only 16 (4.0%) were drafted.

When Narduzzi discusses grad transfers, he distinguishes between the "innocent" and "not-so-innocent" cases. He raises an eyebrow when a major program lands a guy from a tiny one. How else, he wonders, does a Top 25 team find a player from, say, Rhode Island or The Citadel? Even if the school were aware of the player, why would that kid think he could make it at a large State U or that he'd even be welcome if someone didn't reach out and signal some interest? In other words, such cases often imply scouting and recruiting grad transfers, which is not about players seeking better opportunities but coaches doing so. Intra-conference moves are particularly fraught because they're so strongly discouraged and sometimes outright banned for standard transfers, and Narduzzi believes it should be forbidden for graduates. More innocent are the cases where someone—a coach, a friend, a player on a team's current roster—has a connection to a player who's looking for a school. Peterman connected with Pitt through former OC Jim Chaney, who'd recruited the quarterback at Tennessee.

It's a fine distinction and still a step removed from the original intent of the rule, but more problematic is that Narduzzi's view suggests a world in which coaches follow the spirit of the law. Brohm more accurately captures the realpolitik of the situation. He says



THE FULL LEADED JACKET AT LEADBELLY

Lincoln, Neb.

The Full Leaded Jacket began as a joke. The folks at Leadbelly in Lincoln wanted to have fun with a staple of the Nebraska school lunch—chili and cinnamon rolls. So they made a burger that used a cinnamon roll as a bun

and dumped chili, queso, sour cream and jalapeños on top. They figured people would get a laugh. Instead, the Jacket turned into one of Leadbelly's most popular dishes.

It sounds awful, looks worse and tastes divine—

the Boilermakers have an app to track players seeking a grad transfer, but Robert Sampson, his team's director of internal relations, corrects him: They just use Twitter.

IN 2003, the NCAA implemented the Division-I Academic Progress Rate, known as APR. It measures eligibility and retention rates and rewards schools with academically successful athletes. As a result, coaches are more aggressive in urging players to enroll in summer school and remain on track to graduate in four years. "It's a double-edged sword for college coaches now," Narduzzi says. "If they're smart kids—they don't have to be

UPWARD TREND

In the years since Wilson [left] took advantage of the grad-transfer rule, the number of football players switching schools for their final seasons has exploded.



JOHN BIEVER (WILSON)

geniuses—they can get their degree in three-and-a-half or four years. Now you're almost [emphasizing academics] to the point where you could lose a guy. I'm going to get a kid through school, coach him, teach him well, and then all of a sudden he's going to transfer to Clemson?"

In 2011 the SEC banned graduate transfers after Ole Miss sought to add former Oregon quarterback Jeremiah Masoli, who'd pleaded guilty to second-degree burglary charges while with the Ducks. The conference worried that the provision was being abused to help players move on from trouble. In 2014 it amended its policy to accept grad transfers under certain conditions: if the player remained academically eligible as an undergrad, had no significant discipline issues and earned all possible APR points.

At that time, the SEC even began punishing schools whose graduate transfers didn't enroll in nine hours of graduate coursework in their first semester of study and earn all possible APR points during the semesters they were enrolled. In 2015, Florida was banned from accepting grad transfers for three years after Anthony Harrell and Mason Halter didn't meet those criteria. But this spring Notre Dame quarterback Malik Zaire, who lost his job after breaking his leg in '15, expressed interest in the Gators. School and player flirted until June, when the SEC voted to reduce Florida's penalty from three years to one. Zaire enrolled immediately.

The loosening of sanctions has caused some to envision worst-case scenarios. Worried fans envision players coming to their school, developing into stars, then decamping for perennial contenders such as Alabama and Clemson. Coaches imagine having to continue recruiting players even after they're in the program, worrying when they're too harsh that a star might graduate and bolt to a rival.

At the same time, though, there are only so many scholarships Saban can offer. To expect mass exodus is hyperbolic, and as Smith said, players should receive some reward with their diplomas. They're told to go to class, to graduate on time, all the while devoting dozens of hours each week to football—sometimes without even seeing any game action. "I think it's important that those young men who graduate in four years and do what they're supposed to do have an opportunity to get on the field," Holtz says.

Does the NCAA agree? It would seem so. Certainly, the rule and the way it's being enforced have made the game better, distributing talent across a wider range of schools and letting capable players who are stymied on one team find a place to play. In a system that offers players few advantages, it seems fair to grant such a privilege to those who have achieved the stated goal of going to college—earning a degree. In that way it's the rare rule that benefits the student and the athlete. □



Week 8



SATURDAY, OCT. 21

MICHIGAN AT PENN ST.

AFTER THAT brief ACC interlude, we're back to the Big Ten for one last game, this one pitting two of the best teams the East Division has to offer. Last year this game was a 49–10 Michigan blowout in Ann Arbor, but it's hard to imagine anything close to a repeat performance. Penn State hit its stride mid-year in 2016 and never looked back. Between senior quarterback Trace McSorley and junior running back Saquon Barkley, the Nittany Lions' offense should be explosive. Meanwhile Michigan, which lost most of its starting defense from the nation's No. 1 unit a year ago, will still be a challenge on that side of the ball.

Penn State is still a historic place to watch a game. Soak in Happy Valley, and while you're there, make sure to check out Rothrock Coffee for all your caffeine needs. It's a favorite of the Penn State coaching staff, too.

When you've filled your Pennsylvania quotient, you'll have a long drive ahead; it's 14 hours to Memphis. Break it up with a stop in Cincinnati and another in Louisville, where you can't miss checking out a few of the city's famous distilleries. Once you've sufficiently exhausted your liver, move on to Nashville and then finally Memphis, where you should give yourself sufficient time to eat—Rendezvous for ribs, Gus's for chicken—and check out the city's musical and civil rights history.

Week 9



FRIDAY, OCT. 27

TULANE AT MEMPHIS

TBD

SATURDAY, OCT. 28

*Arkansas at
Mississippi*

TBD

OUR FIRST American Athletic Conference matchup offers a chance to see what coach Mike Norvell has done at Memphis since Justin Fuente left for Virginia Tech in 2015. The Tigers should contend in the AAC, thanks in part to fifth-year receiver Anthony Miller, who broke out a year ago with 1,434 yards and 14 touchdowns while averaging 15.1 yards per reception. Tulane, meanwhile, hopes coach Willie Fritz and his option offense can turn the program around. Last year, Fritz's first, the Green Wave finished a disappointing 4-8.

After the game, make the quick drive down to Oxford, Miss. It's just an hour and a half, and you'll want to be there bright and early to tailgate.

► ARKANSAS AT MISSISSIPPI

Get to the Grove, the 10-acre green space on campus where Mardi Gras meets a debutante ball. If you miss the game, we won't blame you, although you should find your seats; it may not be a marquee matchup but it is SEC football.

Stick around Oxford on Sunday, and eat. City Grocery is probably the most popular restaurant in town, but you can also try Ajax or get ribs at B's Hickory Smoke BBQ. When you're stuffed, drive five hours to the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta—also the site of the national championship game on Jan. 8. Poke around then head three hours south to Troy, Ala., by Thursday. You'll pass Auburn on the way.



Week 10



THURSDAY, NOV. 2

IDAHO AT TROY

8:15 P.M. CT

SATURDAY, NOV. 4

*LSU at
Alabama*

TBD

CHECK OUT Troy versus Idaho to get a peek at two potential NFLers. Troy's 6' 1", 235-pound senior running back Jordan Chunn (1,288 yards in 2016) may be the best rusher in the Sun Belt conference while Vandals senior quarterback Matt Linehan (right)—son of Dallas Cowboys offensive coordinator Scott—finished '16 with 3,184 passing yards and a completion percentage of 61.9. It's also Idaho's last season in the FBS, so there's that.

While in Troy hit Butter and Egg Adventures, an outdoor park with a massive zip-lining course. If that's not your speed, try the Pioneer Museum of Alabama before you head out of town. It's less than a three-hour drive to Tuscaloosa.



TIDAL WAVE

Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts [2] ran for 114 yards and a TD on 20 carries in last season's 10-0 win over LSU. The Tide has won six in a row over the Tigers.

at Ole Miss, while Alabama will have had a fairly easy ride after opening against Florida State. Should be fun.

While in Tuscaloosa, check out the Paul W. Bryant Museum, which showcases (guess what?) the history of Alabama football. Then hit the road. First head to Vicksburg, Miss., one of the most significant sites of the Civil War. From there it's slightly more than three hours to New Orleans. Get a po'boy at Domilise's and have dinner at Galatoire's or Jacques-Imo's. Grab beignets at Cafe Du Monde for breakfast. Spend a couple of days before setting off on the seven-hour trek to College Station, Texas.

▲ LSU AT ALABAMA

As is often the case when the Tigers meet the Tide, there will almost certainly be national-title implications. LSU will be coming off a bye and a game



Week 11



SATURDAY, NOV. 11

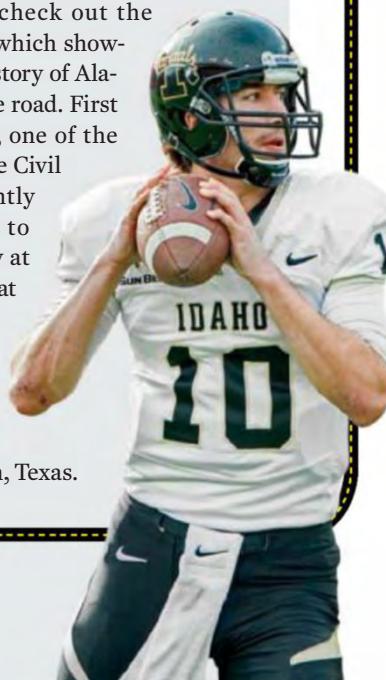
NEW MEXICO AT TEXAS A&M

TBD

ARRIVE IN College Station in time to enjoy a meal at the Dixie Chicken, adjacent to campus and an Aggies mainstay for beer, burgers and (of course) chicken. Then get ready for a unique brand of football, from a vibrant tailgating scene to the yell leaders to the moment when you realize all of Kyle Field is swaying on its foundation.

Going into the season, Aggies coach Kevin Sumlin should be at least a little worried about his job security after three consecutive 8-5 campaigns. His team hasn't had a winning SEC record since 2012, its first year in the conference. By November, Sumlin's fate may have been decided, but New Mexico should be a nice reprieve after the Aggies face Alabama, Florida and Auburn over four weeks. Last season, the Lobos offense focused on the ground and led the nation in rushing, although it lost its leading back, Teriyon Gipson, to graduation. But he was one of two 1,000-yard backs on the roster; the other, Tyrone Owens, will return for his junior season. New Mexico won nine games a year ago, so the game against A&M could be close.

After the final whistle you'll have six days to travel 22 hours to get to Los Angeles. Spend Sunday two hours down the road, in Austin, where you can tour the University of Texas's football facilities and eat at Franklin Barbecue. Monday, drive 11 hours to Santa Fe, and on Wednesday head for the Grand Canyon, another seven hours west. On Friday, take the southern route to L.A. and stop at Joshua Tree National Park. In the morning, it'll take you only three hours to get to the Coliseum.



Week 12



SATURDAY, NOV. 18

UCLA AT USC

It's a story made for L.A.: Two local kids, hotshot quarterbacks, playing for crosstown rivals. One has become something of a bad boy [UCLA's Josh Rosen] and the other a Golden Boy [USC's Sam Darnold]. When their teams meet, bragging rights, a top draft spot, the Pac-12 South title and a shot at the Playoff could be on the line. *Action!* After the game, hit the touristy L.A. sights or bolt for San Diego or Palm Springs before heading up the Coast. Take the PCH for the scenic views.





TROJAN FORCE



ALL THAT'S LEFT is the white antique stove in the kitchen, where Sam Darnold builds tuna rolls from baggies of fresh-caught bluefin. Twenty-four years ago, the house was one story and the ceiling was streaked dark yellow. The backyard was dotted with patches of dead grass, and the garage was filled with motorcycle frames hastily left behind. Neighbors assumed the place was a crystal-meth lab, and that's what they told the young couple who pedaled up on mountain bikes in the winter of 1993, their weekend ride through Capistrano Beach halted by the sight of a FOR SALE sign. "This is a dump," Mike Darnold told his fiancée, Chris Hammer, which meant it was perfect.

Mike was a medical gas plumber in Orange County who serviced hospitals throughout Southern California. Chris was an aspiring P.E. teacher in San Clemente who waited tables at Corky's. They couldn't afford to be picky. They walked gingerly up dilapidated steps to the roof of the garage, which a boy was using as his personal roller blade park. Mike gazed west, over Interstate 5 a block and a half



USC quarterback Sam Darnold ambushed college football by leading his team to nine straight wins last year. He could be the top pick in next year's draft—if they can get him out of SoCal

BY LEE JENKINS

Photograph by **Robert Beck**

SAM DARNOLD

away, through palm trees that framed the coastline like goalposts. He could see, just barely, a sliver of the Pacific Ocean. "We can do this," he told Chris.

Instead of a wedding at the Marriott in Dana Point, they threw a modest reception at Chris's family home in Long Beach followed by a two-night honeymoon at the Blue Lantern Inn, using the money they saved for a down payment. Mike scrubbed every inch of the ceiling, trashed every stitch of the carpet. He chopped down overgrown fruit trees, ripped out doors, tossed blinds and shelves. He painted walls and laid tile. In May 1994, Chris gave birth to their first child, a girl named Franki, and three years later, a doughy redhead boy named Sam. Through elementary school, the siblings shared a tiny first-floor bedroom until Mike designed a second story with peekaboo views all the way to Catalina Island. Growing up, Franki used to pause a tear-jerking Home Depot commercial at the scene in which two newlyweds brush their teeth with bottled water. "That was you," she'd say, and her dad would tell the story all over again about the drug den that became a dream house.

Mike and Chris raised their kids in the water two miles away—"The beach," Chris says, "is everything"—but when Sam started swimming lessons at three, his mom noticed that he kept paddling in circles. Such was the preternatural strength of his right arm.

Sam learned to throw not at a skills camp but at a surf break. He'd charge down the steep wooden stairs at the San Clemente cliffs to Lasuens Beach, known as Lost Winds because it's easier to pronounce. Anyone



WHEN DADS FROM A PRIVATE SCHOOL APPROACHED HIM ABOUT TRANSFERRING, HE TOLD THEM, "I PLAY WITH MY BUDDIES."

who rode the Metrolink from Los Angeles to San Diego over the past decade might have spotted Sam along the shore: slathered in sunscreen to protect his alabaster skin, waves up to his waist, hurling footballs over five-foot swells. Friends fought to find the pigskin in the white water, scoring a point for each recovery. The group would bodysurf until dark and then grab dinner at Pedro's Tacos, one of a hundred low-slung storefronts on San Clemente's vintage main drag, where all the patrons seemed to recognize the ringleader. Back then, Sam Darnold was the perennial champion of the Triton Toss, a distance-plus-accuracy throwing competition held at halftime of a high school game.

Today he is the USC quarterback and the Rose Bowl king, the Heisman Trophy favorite and quite possibly the No. 1 pick in the NFL draft.

DON'T GO BE a big shot," his grandfather used to say, and coming from Dick Hammer those words carried weight. Strangers knew Dick as a USC basketball star (1951 to '54), Olympic volleyball player (1964) and part-time actor who graced billboards as the Marlboro Man. But friends knew him as a firefighter and special-ed teacher at Nightingale



RISING FROSH

The 52–49 Rose Bowl win over Penn State capped a season in which Darnold threw for 3,086 yards.

Elementary School in Long Beach, jobs that suited him because he could pull people from cars and lift children from wheelchairs. His home was open to visitors, but only if they first picked up 10 pieces of trash at El Dorado Park across the street.

Dick was the one Mike and Chris called in late 1993—"I can give you a blowout of a wedding," he said, "or help with this down payment"—and after he died six years later, relatives wondered if he also bequeathed his physical gifts to his precocious grandson. Sam played basketball with his black Lab in the backyard, mud football at Sunset Park, Wiffle ball in Nick Crankshaw's cul-de-sac. Franki was a volleyball star, and when she entered a mixed doubles tournament in Hermosa Beach one summer, she brought Sam because she couldn't find another partner. "He's just learning," she informed their opponent before the match. His opening serve was the first of many aces. "They thought I was hustling them," Franki says. "I had to tell them, 'I'm sorry, my brother is a weirdo.'"

Among blue-chip quarterbacks, Sam was extraordinary for other reasons. As a sophomore at San Clemente High, he played linebacker and wide receiver, and he was as unfamiliar with recruiting rankings as with hieroglyphics. When he was invited to join a 7-on-7 club team, he called it "fake football," and when dads from a private school approached him about transferring at a basketball game, he told them, "I play with my buddies." Not until his junior year did he have a personal quarterback coach, Bob Bosanko, who charged him only \$50 a session. Sam mulled scholarship offers from Duke, Northwestern and Utah, amusing to anybody back home. "I never even went up to Laguna," he says about a coastal town not even 20 miles north. In fairness, when Franki played volleyball at Rhode Island, Sam did take a cross-country flight to visit her, reporting that the landscape reminded him of the set of a horror movie. "If there were a University of San Clemente," Franki says, "that's where he'd have gone."

He settled for another USC, but unlike every other recent Trojans quarterback, he declined to enroll early and skip the second semester of his senior year of high school. Sure, he had to compete with another five-star passer in his class, but he'd already lost one hoops season, by breaking his hand in a brawl with a locker after a last-minute collapse. A sweet-shooting wing with range to 25 feet, he couldn't stand to sacrifice another season. "This is different," said USC head coach Clay Helton, then the offensive coordinator, when Sam called to share his plan. "This is cool."

ON A sun-soaked afternoon in late July at Heritage Hall, Sam Darnold is wearing his San Clemente High basketball shirt and riding a homemade skateboard carved by San Clemente High student Trey Russell. Trey's older brother is USC receiver Jake Russell, Sam's roommate, fraternity brother and best friend. Today, though, someone has come between them, and his name is Tito. Technically, Jake

SAM DARNOLD

is not to blame for Tito's presence. Linebacker Cameron Smith, who shares the off-campus duplex with Sam, Jake and tight end Tyler Petite, decided they needed to have a kitten. When Smith went to a local shelter and adopted the kitty, black with a white face and white paws, Sam was at the Manning Passing Academy in Louisiana. He returned to Los Angeles and discovered the new roomie purring on his bed. "Sam told me he was allergic," Smith says. "But I think he really believed the cat would be a distraction, so we took it back."

Think what poor Tito will miss this fall: a Heisman Trophy campaign for Sam, a Butkus Award drive for Smith, the Sept. 16 game against Texas—the first meeting with the Longhorns since they beat the Trojans for the 2006 national championship. "I was super bummed," says Sam, who was eight when Vince Young crossed the pylon at the Rose Bowl. "Super" is his adjective of choice. His parents are "super chill," his mom is "super emotional" and Petite's family is "super nice" for letting the roommates use their beach house in the South Bay to barbecue and play spike-ball.

Life in the duplex can also be "super hectic," with Smith finding photoshopped pictures on Instagram of Darnold in a 49ers jersey, a sign of draft hype to come. "That would be pretty cool," says Smith, a Niners fan. It was less than two years ago that Smith wanted nothing to do with Darnold. The surfer kid (who doesn't actually surf) arrived in the summer of 2015, trailed by a notorious Twitter account rife with arrogant posts about NFL aspirations and vulgar cracks about SC women. "This," Smith thought, "is a terrible person." A couple of weeks into fall camp, the Trojans were eating in the players' lounge when Darnold lamented the proliferation of social media fakes. "Wait," Smith piped up, "your account isn't real?" Darnold, who scrawled a list of life goals in ninth grade that included "Be remembered as the nice one," was mortified.

Few college quarterbacks get mistaken for middle linebackers, but strangers occasionally see Darnold and Smith engaged in one of their standard debates—"Who wins a fight between a lion and a grizzly bear?"—and ask if they're twins. Darnold hasn't blitzed anybody since his sophomore year at San Clemente, when he replaced an injured QB and lofted a game-tying 40-yard fade down the sideline. But he stands 6' 4", 225 pounds, and teammates appreciate that he neither looks nor acts like a test-tube signal-caller. Southern California produced two far more prominent passers in the year Darnold graduated from high school: Josh Rosen, who

went to UCLA, and Ricky Town, who signed with USC. It is unusual for highly rated quarterbacks to choose the same college, but Darnold was either unfamiliar with protocol or undaunted by it. He followed Town to Troy.

"Best kid plays, right?" he asked Helton, who assured him that snaps would not be predetermined by private coaches or recruiting stars. By the time Darnold finished his first camp, Town was in the process of transferring to Arkansas, and Trojans safety Su'a Cravens, now a member of the Redskins, was offering encouragement rarely afforded a scout-teamer. "Dude, you keep it up," Cravens told Darnold during practice. "You'll be all right." The freshman called home to parrot the exchange.

Darnold redshirted in 2015 and expected to sit behind



junior Max Browne in '16. That spring he took a class called Sports, Business, Media, taught by professor Jeff Fellenzer, who invited agent Scott Boras to speak. The class runs from 6 to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, and when it ended, about 75 students lined up to meet Boras. Darnold was last. A sports nut who devours Colin Cowherd's radio show and Joe Rogan's podcast, Darnold could have quizzed the hardball agent on arbitration-eligible Dodgers, but what he wanted was advice. Introducing himself as "a backup quarterback," he asked how Boras would advise a client stuck on the bench.

"Backup?" Boras remembers saying. "You may be unproven. You may be untested. But your status is never permanent. You're no backup, and you can't label yourself that way." Boras does not represent football players, but he

understands athletes, and for the next 45 minutes he sat with Darnold inside Annenberg Auditorium, explaining the importance of thinking, preparing and identifying as a starter. When they parted, near midnight, Boras left Darnold with a prediction: "Your time is coming."

THE ONLY college game Sam Darnold lost was his first one, late last September at Utah, and afterward he called the guy whose jersey he used to wear. "Don't do anything crazy," Matt Leinart said. "Be yourself." Darnold is not prone to panic. He feels most relaxed outside the refuge of the pocket, relying on what he calls his peripherals, firing to a flash of cardinal from an assortment of arm angles. Coaches



starting job, yet when Browne bought a Razor scooter with oversized tires to get around campus, Darnold called Walmart and ordered another for himself. He defuses awkward situations with disarming gestures. His high school basketball coach, Marc Popovich, used to call timeout before late-game free throws so he could tell the shooter a cheesy joke. (Sample: "What do you call a doctor who flunked out of med school? A dentist.") In Sam's senior season, teammate Scott Herrod was fouled late in a game against Tustin, but Popovich was out of timeouts. He couldn't tell his joke. Sam walked over to Herrod. "Don't worry," he said, "only the season on the line." Herrod stopped laughing in time to sink the free throws.

Darnold wonders, now that he is a redshirt sophomore, if he must expand his laid-back leadership repertoire to include sweeping speeches and dramatic chair-tosses. He hopes not. He is reading a book called *Extreme Ownership*, written by a pair of Navy SEALs who led a unit in Iraq. "You hear about all these huge CEOs who are the first guys to blame somebody else," Darnold says. "If you start taking ownership and taking blame, that's how you

get people on your side. You have to give them a reason why. I can't tell a receiver, *Hey, you ran the wrong route!* I've got to be like, *Dude, if you don't run the right route, then you're not going to catch*

AT THE WHEEL

Darnold was in the driver's seat against Utah State last September and during a prebowl trip to Disneyland.

WHEN THEY PARTED, NEAR MIDNIGHT, SCOTT BORAS LEFT DARNOLD WITH A PREDICTION: "YOUR TIME IS COMING."

speculate that winters on the basketball court sharpened his vision and summers on the baseball diamond varied his delivery. Darnold disdains the specialization of youth sports. The son of a volleyball player at Long Beach City College and an offensive lineman at Redlands, he fashions himself a natural athlete, not a born quarterback. He just happened to wind up under center. And while he welcomes the significance of the position, he dismisses the stress surrounding it.

"You look at USC QBs before him, you see guys who were dead serious, every drive of the utmost importance," says Browne, now at Pitt. "Sam's out there flinging the ball around like he's back in recess at elementary school, playing catch with his friends."

Browne and Darnold competed furiously for the Trojans'

the ball and you're not going to score. And I need to be able to trust you." Asked what tome he might crack next, Darnold demurs. "I don't want to broaden myself *too* much."

He spends free time with private quarterback guru Jordan Palmer, tightening a throwing motion that resembles Clayton Kershaw as much as Aaron Rodgers. "When you're teaching a Little Leaguer how to pitch, you tell him to set the ball on the table behind him, so he gets a bigger arc," Bosanko says. "That's not ideal for a quarterback. You want to be more compact or your release can become too slow. But Sam gets away with stuff that isn't necessarily mechanically sound. It's because he is a freak, but also because he never developed all these robotic habits when he was eight, so he doesn't think too much about his arm slot and his delivery. He just

Week 13



SATURDAY, NOV. 25

NOTRE DAME AT STANFORD

THE ANNUAL MATCHUP is back in Palo Alto this year, and Stanford will likely still be in the hunt for the Pac-12 North title and a shot at the conference championship game. The Cardinal will almost certainly have an eye on the day's Washington-Washington State matchup.

Notre Dame, meanwhile, faces a greater degree of uncertainty after finishing 4-8 a

season ago. With junior Brandon Wimbush taking over at quarterback and two new coordinators (Chip Long on offense and Mike Elko on defense), there's plenty of new perspective and fresh blood in South Bend to right the ship. And apart from DeShone Kizer, the Irish didn't lose a lot of high-level performers from their roster. Still, their defensive line was weak a year ago and doesn't look to have improved in a meaningful way, which will be a hurdle to any significant success.

Once the game is over, so is our road trip, although if you haven't had enough, you can hang around for another week and hit the Pac-12 championship game at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara on Dec. 1. If you do, make a trip to wine country and visit San Francisco; you'll have no shortage of activities from vineyards to Alcatraz to a stroll across the Golden Gate Bridge. If you're looking for more outdoor activities other than imbibing, check out Muir Woods or one of the many beaches along the Bay. Better still, make friends with someone who owns a sailboat and cruise to Sausalito for lunch.

MATT CASHORE/USA TODAY SPORTS



anticipates where a guy will be and puts it there. That's a quality you can't teach. That's feel."

The first time Helton watched Sam play in person, as a senior at San Clemente, the coach expected the recruit to be nervous. It was Sam's first game in nearly a year, after breaking his foot early in his junior season, an injury that prevented him from flooding college coaches with tape. He knew Helton was in the stands, eyeing him. Sam started 13 for 13 with five touchdowns, shedding linebackers like ankle-slapping surf. "Imagine," Helton says, "if he ever really focused on this sport?"

Brent Pry witnessed the result on Jan. 2. Pry is the defensive coordinator at Penn State, which was pureed by Darnold in the Rose Bowl for five touchdowns, 52 points and 453 yards. "I really felt like we didn't see it coming," Pry says. "We watched so much film and we knew he was athletic, but it wasn't the same as being out there on the field with him. When that kid got going it was like, Who the hell is this? Rushing four is not enough for a guy like that. He just kind of jimmy-jammed through and kept the play alive and found a seam."

Penn State only rushed three with 1:27 left, leading by a touchdown, and USC receiver Deontay Burnett broke off his flat route. Super chill, Darnold waited out Burnett, who regrouped and dashed to the post. Darnold found him at the goal line, over two Nittany Lions and in front of a third. "That spiral," Darnold says, "felt like it was in slow motion." He celebrated with a 70-mile drive south down I-5, to the beige two-story traditional with the black Toyota Highlander in front, DARNMOM on the license plate. *Don't go be a big shot.* He walked in the front door at 11 p.m., his parents on the couch, replay on the TV. "Don't you dare wash this," he cooed, flipping Darn Mom a grass-stained jersey.

Darnold's high school coach, Jaime Ortiz, sent him a text message that night: "Your life has forever changed." The next day, he was mobbed at a Buffalo Wild Wings and at a Concordia University volleyball match. He confined himself to the house for most of the remainder of winter break. Not that staying home—and munching bluefin caught by Sean Donnelly, a San Clemente quarterback turned fisherman—is any punishment. "I don't come back as much as I used to, and hopefully one day I won't need it," Darnold says. "But for now I still do." His mother remains a P.E. teacher at Shorecliffs Middle School. His father oversees the plumbing at UC Irvine Medical Center and Children's Hospital of Orange County, occasionally working successive shifts from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m., then 5 a.m. to 1 p.m. As property values in SoCal beach communities continue to spike, Sam begs his parents not to sell.

"People always ask, 'When your brother makes it, will he buy them a house?'" Franki says. "And I tell them, 'No, but he'll probably buy their house.'" □

**EVERY
OUNCE
COUNTS**

CARBS AND ELECTROLYTES TO HELP
YOU GIVE THAT EXTRA OUNCE.

GATORADE

©2017 S-VC, Inc. GATORADE and the G BOLT design are registered trademarks of S-VC, Inc.

THE DRIVE



WHERE CARS + CULTURE MEET

TAKE A RIDE WITH US.

THEDRIVE.COM

 /thedrive  @thedrive  @thedrive

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

SCOUTING REPORTS



IT'S THAT TIME again. The Tide are rolling through their process. The Seminoles are chopping away. The defending champ, Clemson, is sliding into action, and the other 125 FBS programs are sweating through their days and spending their nights dreaming of bowl bids. What follows is **SI'S PRESEASON TOP 25** and our picks for the College Football Playoff: Alabama, Florida State, Ohio State and Oklahoma State. The odds of getting the CFP field right are slim—we have yet to nail it in the first three years—but the fourth time is the charm.

The scouting reports include **WEB CHARTS** showing how a team ranks nationally in eight key offensive and defensive stats. The higher the rank, the closer the data point is plotted to the outside of the circle, so that the chart of a team that's No. 1 in all eight categories would look like a perfect octagon, while a team ranked last in each stat would yield a dot at the center. The charts provide a snapshot of a team's overall ability and a chance to see where it excels or falls short.

There's also a **STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING**. We calculated this by assigning points to opponents on a sliding scale, starting with our Top 25 (which we subdivided into four tiers), then Power 5 teams, Group of Five schools, other FBS conferences and finally those from the FCS. We then adjusted based on the location of the game. The maximum possible score, which a team could get only by facing the Top 12 (and the top seven on the road), would be 94. The team with the toughest slate in our Top 25 is Texas at 58 points, while the easiest is South Florida, with 28. **LET THE FALL MADNESS BEGIN . . .**

SUGAR BOWL

- 1 ALABAMA
- 4 OKLA. ST.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

ALABAMA VS. FLA. ST.

ROSE BOWL

- 2 FLORIDA ST.
- 3 OHIO STATE



NATIONAL CHAMP: *Alabama*

TOP CHOP

Florida State's Dervin James





1

Alabama

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

We were really concerned about [6' 2", 218-pound] Jalen Hurts running the ball against us. They do a good job not asking him to do too much in the passing game. The hard part is even on third-and-long, he can still run and get a first down. We wanted Hurts to beat us throwing the football. He has a strong arm and he can get hot, but he isn't consistent. But he drove them down the field to win the national championship. It just so happens [Deshaun Watson] drove his team to win the national championship right after that. They have huge guys everywhere, but Bo Scarbrough [a 6' 2", 235-pound junior] is a really big back who can move. So is the freshman [6' 2", 227 Najee Harris]. CALVIN RIDLEY [a 6' 1", 190-pound junior receiver] is always a threat.

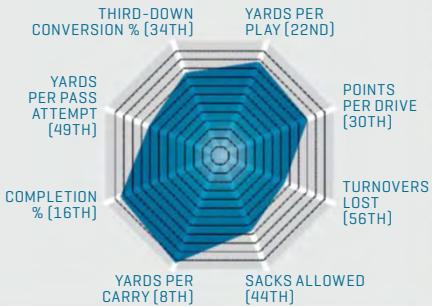
They've got some cats to replace up front on defense. Talent is not the issue. Experience matters. Number 94 [6' 2", 308 junior tackle Da'Ron] Payne is a load, but we'll see how the new guys do. They're going to be well prepared. They're not exotic, but they play with great fundamentals. You don't have to be talented to be a technician, but when you add the talent to being a technician, that's when you get elite. You beat them by making contested catches one-on-one against those long corners. [Minkah] Fitzpatrick (left) can play any position in the secondary, and that gives them options.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Offensive tackle **JONAH WILLIAMS** played on the right side as a freshman, and this year he moves to the left. As a recruit Williams impressed coaches by asking detailed questions about the Tide's scheme, so he should quickly master his role in new coordinator Brian Daboll's offense. He proved himself as a run blocker last year, but his attention to detail and his athleticism suggest he'll be as much a technician in the passing game as he is a mauler in the ground game. Williams's ability to blow open holes will help the Tide's deep stable of backs—Bo Scarbrough, Damien Harris and Josh Jacobs—and make the read-option decisions easier for quarterback Jalen Hurts.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

49

The Tide can overcome a loss against Florida State in Atlanta [9/2] if they blow through the conference: Bama is 25-2 in SEC play in the last three years. LSU's visit [11/4] could be a thriller, but the SEC West race should come down to the Iron Bowl at an improved Auburn [11/25].

Florida State



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Jimbo Fisher does a good job of making sure the quarterback [Deondre Francois, a 6' 1", 205-pound sophomore] makes the right reads and gets the ball to the right guys. Francois got beat up pretty good last

year and still kept going. It's tough to replace a guy like Dalvin Cook. He was a threat to score every time he touched the ball. The freshman back [5' 11", 213-pound Cam Akers] was a five-star recruit who can give them some of what Cook gave them. The little receiver Nyqwan Murray [a 5' 11", 176-pound junior] can fly.

We have to wait and see what [6' 3", 211-pound sophomore safety] Derwin James looks like coming back from the [torn meniscus in his left knee]. In the past you always had to know where he was on the field. You don't have to change your game plan, but you have to be sure your quarterback knows where he is. The last couple of years, they've recruited some leaner pass rushers. Those ends [Josh Sweat, a 6' 5", 250-pound junior, and Brian Burns, a 6' 5", 218-pound sophomore] are a little bit quicker off the ball. They've been down at linebacker the last couple of years. Not bad but not as good compared to their normal standard. But their secondary and defensive line are as good as ever.

53

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

53

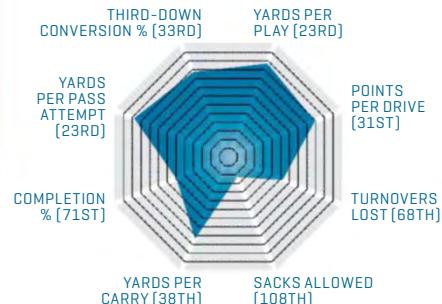
The Seminoles' opener against Alabama [9/2] in Atlanta is the start of a punishing September, which includes visits from Miami [9/16] and a senior-heavy N.C. State [9/23]. The ACC Atlantic title—and likely a playoff spot—will hinge on the trip to Clemson [11/11].



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

The Seminoles' hopes rest on the improvement of their offensive line, and center **ALEC EBERLE** is poised to make the biggest jump. Offseason hip surgery has allowed Eberle to once again participate fully in lower-body workouts, and the 6' 4" junior has bulked up to almost 300 pounds after playing much of last season at 285. Florida State won 10 games last year despite allowing 36 sacks. If the line and sophomore QB Deondre Francois—who occasionally held the ball too long—can cut that number by even one-third, it should produce a more consistent offense and keep the defense from facing bad field position. Eberle and the line also need to generate a better push up front to help the young running backs.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



Ohio State



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

win the Heisman Trophy. He's that talented.

Their scheme is a bit of a mystery: Are they going to run packages that they've run before, or are they going to go all-in on [new coordinator] Kevin Wilson's offense? The [5' 10", 214-pound sophomore] running back MIKE WEBER is really a good player. No disrespect to the guys that matriculated out, but Ohio State's going to be fine. I'm not going to have a sympathy card sent to Urban [Meyer].

It's coordinator Greg Schiano's defense: They do a great job taking the ball away. They're going to play man coverage with a free safety and plus-one you in the box. He was a little more multiple coverage-wise last year than I thought he would be, because he had the cats to play just man if he wanted to. Defensive end Sam Hubbard [a 6' 5", 265-pound junior] is a high-motor, high-energy guy. He's got a great first step and really uses his hands well.

The third phase is their secret sauce—they play really hard in the kicking game. I don't think they get enough credit for that.

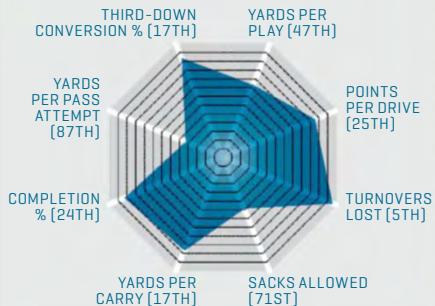
To stop their offense you've got to stop the run, then limit their explosive plays in the passing game. [Quarterback] J.T. Barrett took a beating [as a junior]. If he gets back to where he was two years ago he could



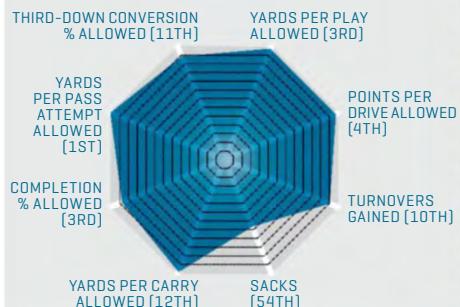
THE PLAYER TO KNOW

The Buckeyes are replacing three starting defensive backs for the second straight season. Expect junior cornerback DENZEL WARD to take full advantage of his newfound playing time and set the tone for the secondary. Ward thrived in a rotational role last fall, when he flashed the closing speed and impeccable timing to make up for a 5' 10", 191-pound frame that doesn't stand out on a roster filled with taller blue-chip recruits. Despite coming off the bench he tied for the team lead with nine pass breakups, and he is the safe bet to emerge as Ohio State's most reliable corner. Playing behind a star-studded quarterback-harassing front seven will only help.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

49

The Buckeyes host Oklahoma [9/9], and they also face two of the East's toughest outs, Penn State [10/28] and Michigan State [11/11], in the Horseshoe—though the trip to Iowa [11/4] in between reeks of a trap game. No matter what, the showdown with Michigan [11/25] looms.

Oklahoma State

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE



They've gotten more multiple on defense over the years; the quarterbacks and the offenses in the Big 12 are too good for anyone to do only one thing. They used to be a strictly four-man front, two safeties.

Now they're moving to a three-man front. Most teams have a weakness somewhere on the defensive line. They really don't. They do some stunting, and they add some blitzes that give you trouble at times, but nothing too complicated. The key is, they play hard. It's a tough conference, and there are so many great offenses, but they're one of the tougher defenses to play against and prepare for. The safety, Za'Carrius Green, looks like a guy who can give teams trouble. And [corner turned safety] Ramon Richards is probably one of their better players.

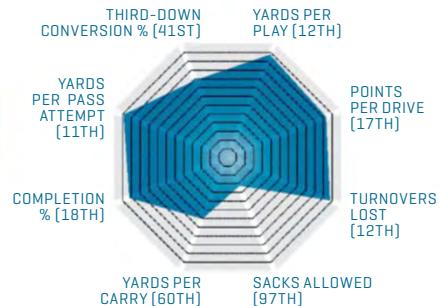
With [6' 5"], 235-pound senior] quarterback Mason Rudolph, they're obviously explosive, with really good receivers. Last year Rudolph threw for more than 4,000 yards [4,091], with 28 TDs and only four picks. They started running the ball better toward the end of the year. They weren't great on the ground the past couple of seasons, but they've gotten better and that's going to make them more dangerous. The receiver, [6' 1", 205-pound senior] JAMES WASHINGTON—he's tough to handle. He stands out.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

As a freshman last season, running back JUSTICE HILL got off to a slow start before exploding for 122 yards against Baylor in Week 4. From there he rolled, posting six 100-yard rushing performances in Oklahoma State's final 10 games. A season ago teams hardly expected a dynamic rushing attack from the Cowboys, which allowed Hill to sneak up on opponents and give the offense some balance. Now, the 5' 10", 170-pound back needs to be more consistent, and he has to do it while teams are scheming to stop him. One promising development: As the year went on Hill broke for longer rushes more frequently, with gains of 30-plus yards in each of his last four games.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

50

A good-but-not-great Pitt [9/16] is the Cowboys' most challenging non-Big 12 matchup. That's not to say Oklahoma State needs to be perfect; a loss to a ranked conference foe might not doom the Pokes, should they go on to win the title showdown.

USC



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

I think the [52–6 Week 1 loss to Alabama] from last year was kinda good for them—obviously not how the game turned out, but it probably gave them the evidence of how they need to play.

On defense, they've got good players up front, like [Rasheem] Green [a 6' 5", 280-pound junior tackle] and [6' 5", 260-pound end Porter] Gustin. I thought they would be better at linebacker. [Cameron] Smith [6' 2", 245] is back and they've got big-time players in some positions, but their depth isn't there. Cornerback Adoree' Jackson was tremendous, but he's not there anymore [first-round pick in 2017 draft], and when I watched the Rose Bowl, I thought what they needed was more players like him in their secondary. Iman Marshall [6' 1", 200] and Marvell Tell III [6' 3", 190] can play, and they're juniors now and have a year in the system, so that should help.

I think [sophomore quarterback Sam Darnold] is excellent. He's got a good arm. He's accurate. That's the biggest thing: Sometimes guys that have the good arm don't have the accuracy that he has. The quarterback from UCLA that everybody talks about [junior Josh Rosen] took a step backward last year. If Darnold doesn't take that type of step back, I would anticipate him dominating because they coach 'em pretty well on offense at USC.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Opponents will need to drop extra defenders into coverage to counter sophomore quarterback Sam Darnold's pinpoint passing. That should leave more room along the line of scrimmage for running back **RONALD JONES II**. The 6' 1", 195-pound junior is a big-play threat who can burst through tight holes, gallop away from pursuers, shake open-field tacklers and make an impact as a receiver. Jones tallied 1,082 yards on 6.1 yards per carry and 12 touchdowns last season despite splitting touches. Now that he's taking on a larger workload, his production should only improve. Darnold is talented, but he could struggle if he doesn't have a potent ground game to support him.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

47

USC avoids Washington and faces Stanford (9/9) at home in Pac-12 play, but the Trojans must overcome road tests against Washington State (9/29) and Notre Dame (10/21). With no bye week, USC could be running on fumes by the time it meets crosstown rival UCLA (11/18).

Oklahoma



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

They have the best O-line in our conference, and it's not close. It's big, physical and tough. They keep [senior quarterback] Baker Mayfield from being hit and allow the receivers to isolate defenders one-on-one. They can do so much with **MARK ANDREWS** [a 6' 5", 254-pound junior]. He can be an in-line tight end or flex out, and he's a great red zone target. He's good enough in routes that you can't use a linebacker on him. Mayfield is emotional, but now he's more levelheaded with his decisions. He throws the deep ball really well. His accuracy on midrange and intermediate throws has improved. He's perfect for what they do. I give [former OC and new coach] Lincoln Riley credit. Lincoln's different from the other Mike Leach guys, because he'll run the ball so much. Their counter plays and how they block you is different.

[DC] Mike Stoops gets *waaaay* too emotional as a play-caller. His team gives up a big play, and you know he's gonna come after you, and you can burn him again. They don't have the same caliber of talent on the front seven. Their secondary, though, is really good. Jordan Thomas [a 6-foot, 185-pound senior corner] gets his hands on a lot of passes. He or [6' 1", 204-pound senior safety] Steven Parker is the best guy on that defense. Jordan Parker [a 5' 11", 188-pound sophomore], the other corner, made them better.

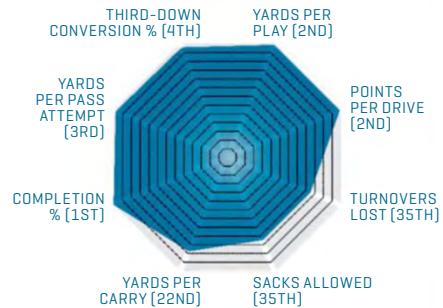
They have the best O-line in our conference, and it's not close. It's big, physical and tough. They keep [senior quarterback] Baker Mayfield from being hit and allow the receivers to isolate defenders one-on-one. They



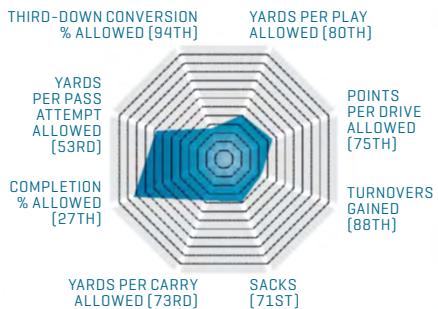
THE PLAYER TO KNOW

The coaching staff says it has a much deeper receiving corps than it did last year, but it's unclear who the Sooners' home run threat will be. Keep an eye on senior **JEFFERY MEAD**. A tight-end sized guy with wide-receiver speed, the 6' 5" 195-pounder made only 16 catches in his first three seasons in Norman, but he started to flash late last year, and that momentum has carried over to the offseason. "He's almost 6' 6", has long arms, and he can jump out of the gym," says quarterback Baker Mayfield. "He just needed to put on a little weight and get a bit stronger. I don't think he realized how good he was. He finally had that light click, but that was all him. He turned it on. Credit to him for making that transition."

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

55

Ugh. Lincoln Riley's first road game as coach will be at Ohio State [9/9], the first of six dates with potential Top 25 teams—only one of which will be in Norman. Those matchups include the Red River showdown with improving Texas [10/14] and a visit to Oklahoma State [11/4].



Clemson



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

What sticks out to me with Clemson is that the number of dynamic playmakers seems to recycle over time. The team will lose [quarterback] Deshaun Watson [first-round pick of the Texans], and whether it's this year

or next year, someone else almost as good will come up through. [Junior] Kelly Bryant may start this year, but the younger guys [four-star recruit Zerrick Cooper and five-star Hunter Johnson] will put the pressure on. They turn over receivers every year, and the next guy is every bit as good as the guy that they lost. [Junior] Deon Cain will be the next guy. When I watch them I don't sit there and say, *Boy they've got all the answers and everything covered*. A lot of times the players cover it more than the scheme does.

These guys are well-coached and very good fundamentally within what they do. There's a reason that they've hung [75 points] on Alabama the last two years. It's that they have what we call multiples; they don't have one guy that has 90 catches and everybody else is at 20 or something like that. It's spread out.

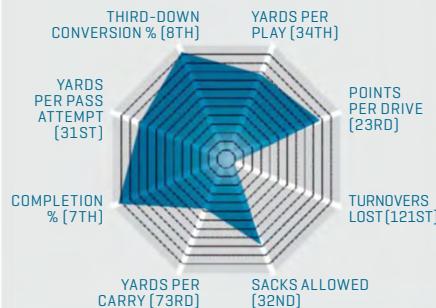
HUNTER RENFROW [5' 11", 180-pound junior receiver] is fast and tough and runs good routes. Dexter Lawrence [a 6' 5", 340-pound sophomore DT] is dominant. You can see his explosion and get-off. Up front, they don't ask those [D-linemen] to do too much; they just go play.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

It didn't take junior offensive tackle **MITCH HYATT** long to show why he was a coveted recruit out of North Gwinnett [Ga.]. High in the class of 2015, while most linemen need at least a year to get acclimated to the college game, the 6' 5", 295-pounder became Clemson's starting left tackle as a freshman. He then anchored a line at the heart of an offense that for two years in a row ranked sixth in the country, according to Football Outsiders' S&P + statistic. With six new starters on offense and quarterback Deshaun Watson gone to the NFL, it will be even more important that Hyatt keep the pocket clean while Watson's replacement—likely to be junior Kelly Bryant—gets settled in.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

51

A visit from Auburn [9/9] offers a shot at a big nonconference win early, and Clemson hosts Florida State [11/11]. Still, the Tigers' ACC schedule is littered with land mines, including road trips to Louisville [9/16], Virginia Tech [9/30] and N.C. State [11/4].

Penn State

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

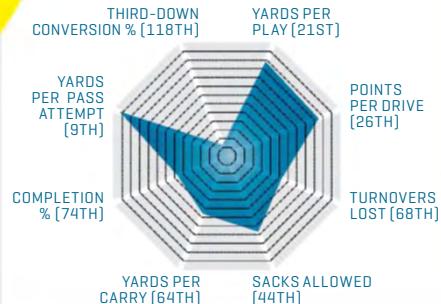
Saquon Barkley is the best back I've seen in years. He has great vision, speed and balance. He is so explosive and so great with that jump cut. He's also not afraid to put his shoulder down and is bigger [5' 11", 223 pounds] than you think. I love the quarterback, [senior **TRACE MCSORLEY**]. He doesn't look like much in warmups, but he's a winner. He's excellent at keeping plays alive. The tight end, [6' 6", 252-pound senior Mike Gesicki] pops on film. He's so athletic, and you don't have many answers for him. They're not great on the O-line, but that back makes them look better. And they're well-coached. Bringing Joe Moorhead on as the coordinator [before the 2016 season] is the best move James Franklin made. They don't do a lot formationally, but they're dangerous because they run their system so well and they can expose you on the perimeter.

They won't wow you with their talent in the front seven, but they're aggressive and [DC Brent] Pry will come after you. Curtis Cothran [a 6' 5", 280-pound senior defensive tackle] could play for anyone. He moves well for an inside guy. They were banged up at linebacker, and it showed, but I like [6' 1", 232-pound senior Jason] Cabinda. He jumps out. Christian Campbell [a 6' 1", 194-pound senior] has impressed us. He's a long corner who can run and tackle.

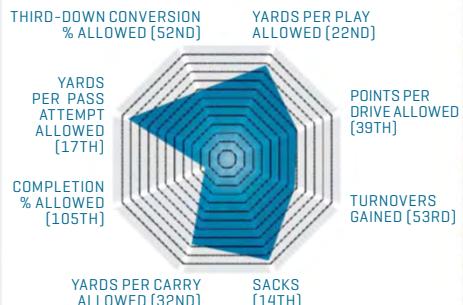
Saquon Barkley is the best back I've seen in years. He has great vision, speed and balance. He is so explosive and so great with that jump cut. He's also not afraid to put his shoulder down and is bigger [5' 11",



OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING **47**

Out of conference the Nittany Lions have three home games, including one against Pitt [9/9], which beat them last year. In conference a brutal three-week stretch awaits: Michigan [10/21] at home, then trips to Ohio State [10/28] and Michigan State [11/4]. That's asking a lot.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

The Nittany Lions have to replace big-play wideout Chris Godwin, their leading receiver in 2016. They're stocked with rangy targets that at field level resemble defensive ends, but the one who has generated the most buzz this offseason has been a 6' 4", 218-pound sophomore with 4.5 speed—**JUWAN JOHNSON**. An

Academic All-Big Ten qualifier last year, Johnson was primarily Godwin's backup and a special-teamer. Now he's primed to slide into one of the outside receiver spots which are big weapons in Joe Moorhead's system. "He wasn't consistent before," the offensive coordinator says. "He's brimming with confidence now. Juwan had a phenomenal spring."

Washington

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Washington's defensive scheme gives people problems because they attack. If your team can't beat man-to-man coverage, you're going to have problems. But they lost some top players to the NFL in their secondary.

That's a concern: With all of the man-to-man they play, they ask a lot of their corners in coverage. Their front seven controls the line of scrimmage, and they run a lot of stunts with their tackles and ends. Their defensive coordinator, Pete Kwiatkowski, does a really good job scheming and making you make mistakes.

What makes [junior quarterback] Jake Browning special is his ability to hit [receivers in the] hands, and he doesn't make mental mistakes. He has an incredibly high football IQ. As a defense you always hope the other team is going to throw a few bad balls, and he doesn't do that. And then you put him with [junior running back] MYLES GASKIN, who has a great ability to make you miss. He's a smaller back [5' 10", 191 pounds], but the guy's a real dude. They have a great tandem of running backs with Gaskin and [5' 11", 223-pound senior] Lavon Coleman.

Washington may have lost John Ross at receiver, but [coach] Chris Petersen has built that program up and they bring back an elite quarterback, so they'll be better than they were last year.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

43

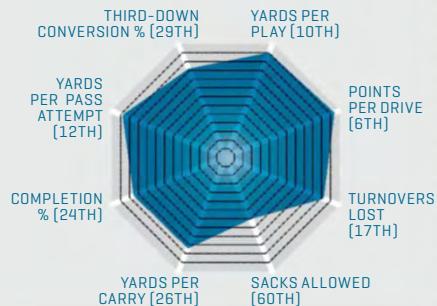
The Pac-12 North title runs through Palo Alto, where Washington visits [11/10]. UCLA [10/28], Oregon [11/4], Utah [11/18] and Washington State [11/25] all come to Seattle. But the likely South winner and title-game foe—USC—handed UW its lone regular-season defeat last year.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Star safety Budda Baker and standout corners Sidney Jones and Kevin King are gone from a defense that led the Pac-12 in yards allowed per attempt last season (3.65). Taylor Rapp, last year's Pac-12 defensive freshman of the year, should join returning junior starter JoJo McIntosh to solidify Washington at safety. But the questions at cornerback aren't as easily answered. Freshman **BYRON MURPHY** (5' 11", 177 pounds), a four-star recruit who redshirted last season, will need to have a breakthrough year. He shone this spring, leading the Huskies in interceptions. If he can sustain that level of performance Washington will have a chance to defend its conference title.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



10 Auburn

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE



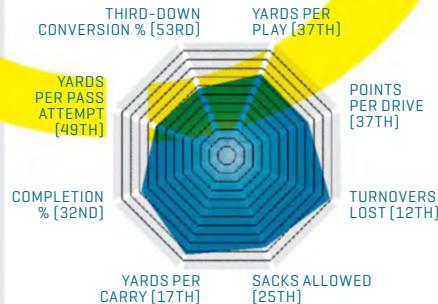
The offense has a chance to be good if [Jarrett] Stidham, [a 6' 3", 214-pound sophomore transfer quarterback] is as good as advertised. When he played at Baylor, he could sling it. The question is, will they run him

as much as they ran Nick Marshall? They may not have to with those backs [juniors Kamryn Pettway, 6-foot, 235, and KERRYON JOHNSON 6-foot, 212]. It was clear what they could do when Pettway was healthy last year. Gus Malzahn does a good job of making mismatches with formations, and they keep you off guard because you can't just load up to stop the run. If you dedicate too much to it, they'll burn you over the top. They like to get the ball to the perimeter a lot too. So you've got to tackle in space.

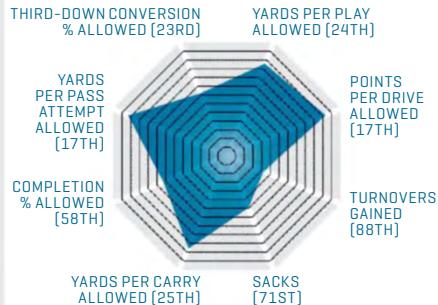
They've got a really good defensive front. They play physical. They play with their hands. They play low. They lost some good players on the interior line, but I know they have some guys they feel good about. [Defensive end] Marlon Davidson was a big-time recruit, and he started as a freshman last year. At 6' 3", 282, he's only going to get better. We'll see if [former No. 1 recruit] Byron Cowart can give them anything as a [6' 3", 283-pound junior] defensive end. They're very athletic in the secondary. There are not a lot of favorable matchups. Tray Matthews, the [6' 1", 209-pound senior] safety is everywhere.



OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING: 52

Auburn's trip to Clemson [9/9] will offer an early test, but October will decide the Tigers' fate. They host Ole Miss [10/7] and then travel to LSU [10/14] and Arkansas [10/21]. If all goes to plan, Auburn will host Alabama [11/25] with the SEC West title on the line.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

If Auburn's offense improves as expected, the key to competing for the SEC title will be avoiding a drop-off on defense after several losses on the front line. Enter defensive end **MARLON DAVIDSON**. In 2016 the 6' 3", 282-pound Davidson became the first true freshman in 30 years to be a Day One starter on Auburn's defensive front. He finished the season with 38 tackles and six tackles for loss, but he'll need to spend more time in the backfield this year. Along with tackle Dontavious Russell and linebacker Jeff Holland, both juniors, Davidson will have to keep pressure on opposing quarterbacks to take pressure off Auburn's athletic-but-thin secondary.

Michigan



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

[Junior] Wilton Speight isn't a great quarterback, but he's solid. He's efficient. He's not a great runner, though he does have surprising es- capability for someone who's 6' 6", 243 pounds. He man- ages the game well.

[Coach Jim] Harbaugh wants to beat you into the ground, and he's got a big, physical team. All 22 guys, the backups, special teams—they look the way they're supposed to look.

They're so aggressive on defense, whether they're playing man coverage or in their zone packages and third-down stuff. Don Brown is the most aggressive defensive coordinator I've seen in a long time. That system has worked for him for 25 years and he keeps tweaking. Now he's got a lot of high-level talent and depth. You can get some chunk plays against them because of all the man coverage, but you've got to finish drives. They're stingy in the red zone.

They've lost a lot of guys to the NFL, but many of these new starters have played and they're talented. We loved [sophomore] defensive tackle RASHAN GARY. To be that big [6' 5", 287 pounds] and move like he can is rare. He's gonna be an All-America either this year or next. I like [6' 2", 282-pound senior defensive tackle] Mo Hurst. He's a powerful dude with good feet. Mike McCray [a 6' 4" senior linebacker] is rangy and does a lot for them. He's 245 and moves like he's 220.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Junior defensive end **CHASE WINOVICH** is a former high school quarterback who started two games last season and had eight TFLs and five sacks while playing in the shadow of the now NFL-employed Taco Charlton on a loaded defensive line. Ask Wolverines team leaders who they expect to have a breakout 2017—aside from defensive tackle Rashan Gary—and a lot will stump for Winovich. In hopes of becoming more than primarily a third-down edge rusher, Winovich bulked up in the offseason, adding 10 pounds, so that he now checks in at 6' 3", 245. Offensive tackle Mason Cole, who faces Winovich at practice every day, said of his seemingly tireless teammate, "He has the best motor I've ever seen."

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

53

The Wolverines open with Florida in Texas [9/2], then face Top 12 in-conference foes Penn State [10/21] and Wisconsin [11/18] on the road before hosting Ohio State [11/25]. The PSU game follows a bye for the Lions, who are hungry for payback after a 49-10 pasting last year.

1

Wisconsin

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

They're really, really good up front on both sides of the ball. There's going to be a change on defense, with new coordinator Jim Leonhard taking over after a year as the defensive backs coach. He played at Wisconsin and has been through the NFL, so there will be a couple tweaks to the defense, but I don't think there's going to be a lot of change. They've done a good job defensively, and they have a lot of guys back. Up front there are four that have started and played a lot. Inside linebackers [6' 2", 233-pound senior] JACK CICHY and [6' 1", 246-pound junior] T.J. Edwards are good players. And inside linebacker Chris Orr [a 6-foot, 226-pound junior] was hurt a year ago. I think they'll be good at outside linebacker, but not as good without Vince Biegel and T.J. Watt [both drafted].

On O, they're always going to run the football. In the passing game they're going to try to get some big plays down the field. They've got a new quarterback in [6' 4", 213-pound sophomore] Alex Hornibrook, and he's been in the mold of some of their previous guys—he's a game manager who can run and throw some. Watching them toward the end of last year, they had some guys outside that could make some big plays.

And most of the time, the well-coached, fundamental teams are good at special teams. Wisconsin fits that mold.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

42

Wisconsin has the personnel—especially on D—to win the Big Ten West. A season-ending trip to Minnesota [11/25] will be a challenge, as will a trip to Nebraska [10/7]. Even if the Badgers lose to Michigan [11/18] in a crossover showdown, a win in the Big Ten title tilt could catapult them into the playoff.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW



15

LSU



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

[Sophomore **DERRIUS** GUICE] is a beast. He might be a better back than Leonard Fournette. He's smaller [5' 11", 212 pounds], but harder to tackle because he runs with so much juice guys can't corral him. I love him.

People talk about how their O-line is supposed to be so good. I don't see it. They're pretty average, and I don't see any early-round NFL talent. Their wideouts look good, but they're inconsistent, and they don't have a No. 1 guy. New offensive coordinator Matt Canada is creative and good at finding ways to run the ball even when the box is loaded, and he is a great play-caller. He'll be 10 plays ahead and put plays together that look alike but are very different. But those receivers better get in shape because of all the motioning and shifts he'll do; their legs will be gone by October.

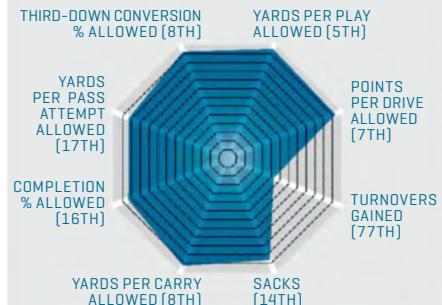
Defensive coordinator Dave Aranda does a really good job. He's aggressive with his safeties, and he stunts and moves his fronts. He did a lot more of that at Wisconsin than at LSU, but it was only his first season there. They're just so talented. Arden Key [a 6' 6", 238-pound junior linebacker] is as good as any player in the SEC. He's long and has a great first step. He's not as big as most of the edge guys in the conference, but he's quicker and slipperier.



OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Sophomore defensive tackle **RASHARD LAWRENCE** earned a starting job after a standout spring, and the 6' 3" 300-pounder will be an imposing force on the right side. LSU coach Ed Orgeron said Lawrence was the defensive player that had "improved the most" during the offseason, showing particular progress with his hands and footwork. Coach O revealed in July that Lawrence is also a 4.0 student. Last year Lawrence played sparingly, putting up stats in just four games—six tackles and one sack. But the top recruit in Louisiana in the class of 2016, according to ESPN, is a big body with impressive mobility, and he has the stuff to be one of the SEC's best defensive linemen this fall.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

51

The Tigers playoff path goes through four teams in SI's Top 25: at Florida [10/7], Auburn [10/14], at Alabama [11/4] and Texas A&M [11/25]. Could the SEC get two entries? Potentially. But LSU will have to earn it, starting with a visit from BYU [9/2].



1 Louisville



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

That guy [6' 3", 211-pound junior quarterback] Lamar Jackson (left) is a stud. I like him better than I liked [Clemson's] Deshaun Watson last year. Jackson has a stronger arm. He's not as steady a guy as Watson was,

but it's not even close athletically. Watson could get 20 yards on a run; with Jackson, he's gone. You can have him penned in, and he'll make three guys miss, outrun your whole defense and pick up the first down. He needs to run well because their O-line is below average.

Their tight ends [junior Micky Crum and senior Charles Standberry] are good players, and their receivers [junior Jaylen Smith and sophomore Seth Dawkins] are adequate. They look the part but drop a lot of balls. [Coach Bobby] Petrino calls the plays and he's good, but when adversity hits, he hurts that team. He'll add to the problem because he'll scream at the kids, and their heads will go down.

They were the best defense we faced last year. Very talented. Very aggressive. Sometimes overly aggressive. Last year we tried to throw a lot to the perimeter to get it out of our quarterback's hands in a hurry. Their DBs are big-time athletes. That's the one thing that jumps out at you with this defense. JAIRE ALEXANDER [a 5' 11", 192-pound junior cornerback] is a great cover guy with great feet. He's the best corner we saw last year.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Senior **REGGIE BONNAFON** has been an all-purpose player for Louisville's offense during his career, and he'll spend his fourth season as the team's No. 1 running back. He began as a quarterback in 2014, then played (mostly) running back in '15 before moving to wide receiver in '16. During his last stint in the backfield he was fifth on the team in rushing with 175 yards, but this time around he'll be the lead back. Though quarterback Lamar Jackson, the reigning Heisman Trophy winner, led the Cards in rushing last year (1,571 yards), watch out for Bonnafon, who at 6' 3" and 212 pounds will be a fast, physical presence in the ground game.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

47

Nonconference games against Purdue (9/2) and at Kentucky (11/25) should be easy, but the ACC Atlantic will be tough. The Cardinals host Clemson (9/16) and go to Florida State (10/21). If they split those and still win the division, the conference championship could be a playoff play-in.

15

Stanford

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

why the coaches didn't lean on him more. Last year their O-line wasn't anywhere near as good as it's been, but I expect them to get a lot better because they've been recruiting well up front. They struggled at quarterback. [Senior] KELLER CHRYST is a huge kid [6' 5", 234], but he struggles seeing coverages.

They're fundamentally sound on defense and good tacklers. They do a lot and they do it well, which is uncommon. They're big on movement up front and multiple and disciplined. Usually you can catch a guy out of his gap with teams that have that much movement, but not them. They're impressive in how well they run to the ball. The guy who doesn't get enough credit is [6' 3", 241-pound senior outside linebacker] Joey Alfieri. He's savvy and anticipates well. He makes a lot of plays for them. Their secondary has no weaknesses. They're more athletic on the back end than people give them credit for. Quenton Meeks [a 6' 2", 197-pound junior] is an excellent corner. I could see him as a first-round guy. Brandon Simmons, the free safety [who's 6 feet, 199], is a really good player too.

Bryce Love [a 5' 10", 196-pound junior running back] has a lot of speed, but he never seems to be healthy. [Trent] Irwin is a good receiver. He's got nice size [6' 2", 205] and is a great route runner. I don't know



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING 

Stanford visits USC [9/9] early, but the key games are at Washington State [11/4] and home against Washington [11/10]. Last year Stanford lost to those two by a combined 86-22. If the Cardinal sweeps the Evergreen State, they'll likely get another shot at the Trojans in the Pac-12 title game.



PLAYER TO KNOW

Stanford has had a terrific run of tight ends, and the 6' 6", 242-pound senior DALTON SCHULTZ is the next in the pipeline. Expect a jump from last season's 23 catches for 222 yards and one touchdown as the big target helps boost an offense that dropped from 30th in the nation in red zone TD percentage in 2015 to No. 123 in '16. "Our desire for Dalton was to be that complete NFL tight end. And that's what he's becoming," says Stanford coach David Shaw. "As we stabilize the offensive line and quarterback positions, he's one of the guys I think is going to benefit and really have a breakout year. And it won't just be statistically. He's one of those guys that you're going to see play on Sundays."

1

Georgia

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

JACOB EASON [sophomore quarterback] is a young guy, still developing. He's got a chance to be a good one. He was a freshman who started 12 games in the SEC. Just to get on the field at that age against that

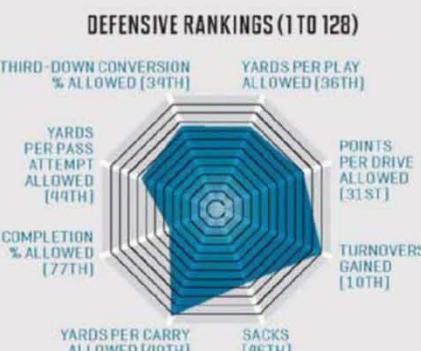
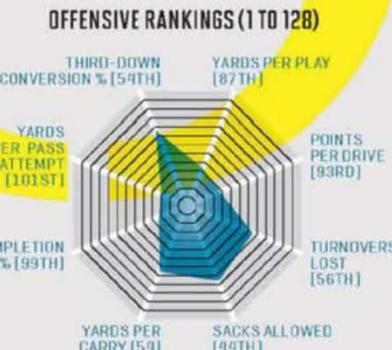
level of competition, physically and mentally—that's impressive. He's a big kid [6' 5", 235 pounds], so he's got good strength, and he's only going to get stronger. He can take the hits.

I think seniors Nick Chubb and Sony Michel are both quality SEC backs. They're not the premier backs in the league, but they're good players. They have a big offensive line as always; I didn't think they were overly tough last year.

On defense they're solid. I didn't think their corners were very impressive—they weren't dynamic physically or with playmaking ability. Pretty solid guys, but they didn't seem to be those big corners you see at LSU and some other schools in the conference.

They are a well-coached, disciplined team. Putting your stamp on a program, coaching the guys and training the guys and developing the guys—that takes a while. That transition can't take place in six months, and that's basically what [second-year head coach Kirby Smart] had last year before his first game. I think this year's team will be a much better indication of what you're going to see in the future from Smart.

YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT [101ST]
COMPLETION % [99TH]
YARDS PER CARRY [54]
SACKS ALLOWED [44TH]



Georgia travels to Notre Dame [9/9] and Georgia Tech [11/25], and its SEC crossover game is at Auburn [11/11]. If the Dawgs win the East—highlighted by a trip to Tennessee [9/30]—they would be underdogs in the SEC championship, but they would have a shot.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

44



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Georgia needs playmakers on the perimeter, and 5' 11", 185-pound junior receiver **TERRY GODWIN** can help. He ranked second on the Bulldogs with 397 receiving yards in 2016, but he could turn into sophomore quarterback Jacob Eason's go-to target this season. Godwin looked good in spring practice and hauled in five passes for a team-high 130 yards in Georgia's spring game in April. His ability to scamper for big gains after catching short and intermediate passes will strain defenses already worried about how to stop senior running backs Nick Chubb and Sony Michel. That's why the Bulldogs will likely go as far as Godwin—and its other wide receivers—can carry them.

1 *South Florida*



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

The motor of the whole team is [6-foot, 210-pound senior quarterback] **QUINTON FLOWERS**

There were a lot of times last year when schematically they were not quite together, and Quinton could erase some of

those issues. Even when you assign a spy to him, he can make that one guy miss. There are not many teams in this league that have somebody that can get him on the ground when it's one-on-one and he's flushed out of the pocket. He needs to be treated like a running back in the run game, and in the passing game, he's going to make his plays. D'Ernest Johnson [a 5' 10", 208-pound senior running back] will be as good in the running game as Marlon Mack was last year because Johnson won't miss a read. He'll make the offensive line better.

They force a lot of fumbles, and they recover just about all of them [11 of 14 in '16] because of their team speed. [Senior] Deatrack Nichols was the hardest cornerback for us to get open on in the league last year. Overall, the pass defense wasn't as bad as people think. They're a big-play offense, and because they scored so fast, their defense played more plays than the offense.

Under coach Charlie Strong, you're probably going to see more penalty discipline and a little more physicality at the line of scrimmage.



OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Wide receiver MARQUEZ VALDES-SCANTLING caught only 22 passes in his first season of eligibility after transferring from N.C. State, but five of those catches went for touchdowns, tying him for the team lead with his former high school teammate Rodney Adams.

Valdes-Scantling, with his lanky 6' 5", 207-pound frame and straight-line speed, also showed that he can be a home run threat, averaging 18.9 yards per catch. USF's offense should still revolve around Quinton Flowers's legs, but if Valdes-Scantling can deliver consistently enough in his senior season to handle a high-volume role, he should emerge as his quarterback's new favorite target.

STRENGTH
OF SCHEDULE
RATING

The Bulls could be the Group of Five team to run the table and steal a playoff spot—but their best nonconference opponent is Illinois [9/15], so they'll need chaos in the Power 5. In November they host Houston [11/4] and Tulsa [11/16], then visit rival UCF [11/24].

1 Florida

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

We went back and watched [graduate transfer quarterback] Malik Zaire [playing for Notre Dame] against Texas [in 2015] and then the game he got hurt in [against Virginia]. Zaire could give them an element that they didn't have with [departed QB Austin] Appleby: a guy who can make plays with his arm and his feet. He can make a difference. They still have a lot of speed on the perimeter. [ANTONIO] CALLAWAY [a 5' 11", 197-pound junior] can always get open, and [at 6' 2", 196] Tyrie Cleveland has some size and can run. They've got a good running back [5' 10", 213-pound junior Jordan Scarlett], too. The kicker [junior Eddy Pineiro] has an explosive leg.

We'll have to see if the defense changes much with [first-year coordinator] Randy Shannon taking over for Geoff Collins. They might not be as deep as they were in the secondary—especially with [senior] safety [Marcell] Harris out for the year [with a torn right Achilles tendon]—but they're still going to make your quarterback throw the ball into tight windows. They also may be a little better at getting after the quarterback. Cece [Jefferson] might have been a little too small to play tackle [at 6' 1", 261], but he can play at end. Jabari Zuniga [a 6' 3", 245-pound sophomore DE] might be the best of the group.

MIKE EHRMAN/GETTY IMAGES (CALLAWAY); COURTESY OF UAA COMMUNICATIONS (REESE)

▼▼▼



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

DAVID REESE, a 6-foot, 244-pound sophomore inside linebacker, is a big reason why Florida's defense should recover from losing eight NFL draftees. Reese proved capable while filling in for an injured teammate last November, handling the bulk of the pre-snap communications. He finished with 49 tackles, even though he didn't take on a full-time role until the ninth game. If fellow linebacker Vosean Joseph, defensive end Jabari Zuniga and cornerback Chauncey Gardner Jr., all sophomores, are as ready as Reese, new coordinator Randy Shannon and the rejuvenated defense can lead the Gators to a third consecutive SEC East title.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING 

The Gators will be underdogs in most of their big games, but a home tilt against LSU [10/7], a match with Michigan [9/2] in Texas and a visit from Florida State [11/25] give the Gators a path. A few upsets, an SEC East title and a conference crown would put them in playoff contention.

10 Kansas State

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Kansas State's defense is about as basic as it gets, but it's really good. It was No. 1 in the Big 12 in rush defense and total defense. It's more of a base defense—four down, two safeties—but the players know how you're going to attack them, and they know how to cover it up. They don't give up big plays. They have a tackle [6-foot, 306-pound senior], **WILL GEARY**, who's a really good player. Secondary-wise, they're strong. D.J. Reed [a 5' 9" junior cornerback] does a great job of defending the deep ball and tackling anything underneath. They play hard, and they're tough.

They have a lot more scheme on offense. They run more multiple sets. They're a spread team, but they still utilize a lot of tight end and fullback packages. They've got people coming back, and that's going to make this a good team. Their quarterback [6' 3", 212-pound senior Jesse Ertz] is an outstanding athlete who can hurt you through the air, but he's also a great runner. In third-and-threes or third-and-fives, with a lot of teams it's an automatic pass. Ertz is accurate and can do that, but he also can pull it down and run. They're very physical on the offensive line.

Your possessions are going to be limited because they do such a good job of protecting the football and moving the chains.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

51

Road games at Texas [10/7] and Oklahoma State [11/18] will be challenging, and Oklahoma [10/21] and West Virginia [11/11] are tough matchups even at home. Even if the Wildcats overperform, a nonconference schedule highlighted by Vanderbilt [9/16] could hold them back.

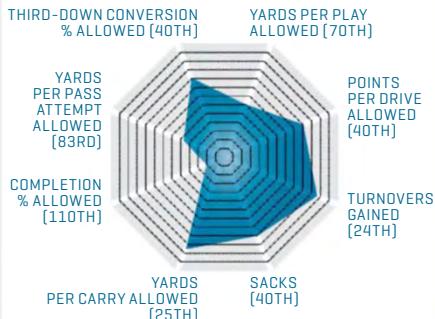


THE PLAYER TO KNOW

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DANIEL DUNN/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP (GEARY); COURTESY OF KANSAS STATE (REED)

2017 Miami



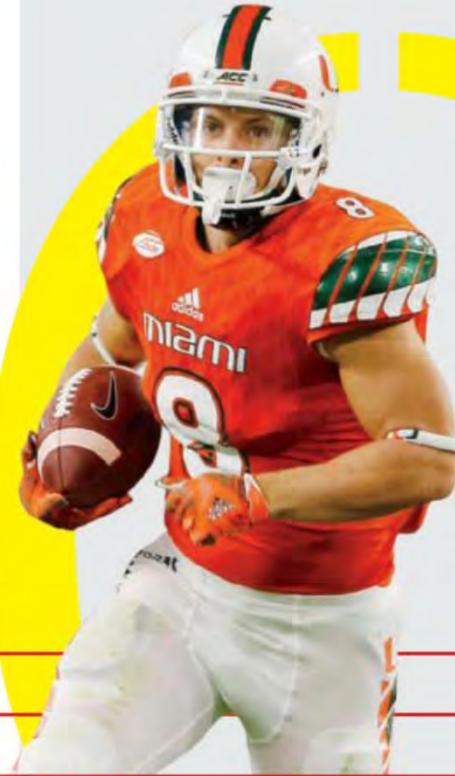
OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

There was a huge difference in Miami's discipline last season. The year before, things got a little bit out of hand with the penalties. Last year they saw fewer flags—and they played much more physical.

They've always been able to recruit well. [Top 15 class coming in.] Everybody's waiting to see those high recruiting rankings come to fruition on the field. This could be the year.

[Miami's linebackers] can run. They play sideline to sideline, and they're physical. It's a good combination, and to see those guys play at the level they did, as young as they were [three freshman starters: Zach McCloud, Michael Pinckney and Shaquille Quarterman], was A) impressive and B) scary. Up front, sometimes you get guys that can rush the passer but are not as good against the run. I felt like their D-ends [senior Chad Thomas and junior Demetrius Jackson] were as good against the run and could move. They're big and physical inside.

[Senior wide receiver] BRAXTON BERRIOS has talent, and he can make plays. He has the ability to be explosive in space, so he's a guy that you definitely have to be concerned about. [Sophomore wide receiver] Ahmmon Richards does a nice job of competing for balls. He made a lot of plays and competitive catches that really stood out to me.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Two-time FCS All-America cornerback **DEE DELANEY** announced his transfer to Miami from The Citadel in late February. He has the size [6' 1", 193 pounds], athleticism and instincts to lock down wide receivers and make QBs pay for throwing the ball in his direction [six interceptions, eight pass break-ups in 2016]. The Hurricanes' front seven should rank among the ACC's best this season, but their secondary could be a weak spot. If the line can bring the heat, it will buy Delaney some time to adjust in a tougher conference with bigger, faster players. Once he gets comfortable, he should elevate Miami's D from great to outstanding.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH
OF SCHEDULE
RATING

42

Miami's toughest test comes early, when it meets rival Florida State in Tallahassee [9/16]. The Hurricanes can lose to the Seminoles and still win the ACC Coastal. Beating Notre Dame at home [11/11] could give them a marquee win heading toward the conference championship game.

West Virginia



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

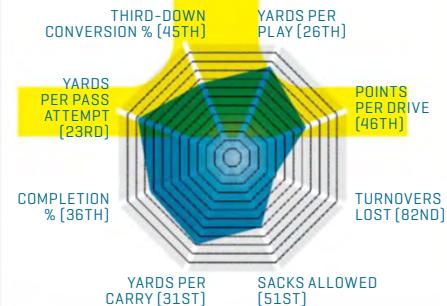
We know what Will Grier [a 6' 2", 204-pound transfer quarterback] can do, so we don't really need to go back and look at what he did at Florida. It's more about what he does within West Virginia's scheme.

That's why it's more important to catch up on what [new offensive coordinator] Jake Spavital did at Cal. [Head coach] Dana Holgorsen says he's going to let Spavital call all the plays, but we'll see. Dana's a genius with his version of the Air Raid. They've got a really good back [in 6-foot, 202-pound senior Justin Crawford], and they'll use him to wear you out late in a game. They lost some dudes that could go at receiver, but they've still got some fast, skilled guys. [KA'RAUN] WHITE [who's a 6' 1", 197-pound senior] can play, and [6' 3", 201-pound junior David Sills V] has done some good things.

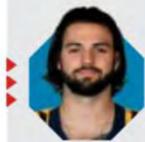
On defense they lost a ton of players, but what gives you trouble is DC Tony Gibson's scheme. The front doesn't present as anything. Is it a 3-4? Is it a 3-3-5? It's just some guys moving around, and then they jump into their gaps at the snap and you have to figure it out. That middle linebacker [Al-Rasheed Benton, 6-foot, 237-pound senior] is always around the ball. On the back end they always seem to have long, big guys. Their hybrid safety [Kyzir White, 6' 2", 218] is pretty versatile.



OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

WILL GRIER went 5-0 at Florida as a freshman in 2015, before he was suspended for a year after a positive NCAA drug test. Instead of waiting in Gainesville, Grier transferred to Morgantown, where he takes over an offense that brings back dynamic senior runner Justin Crawford [1,184 yards, 7.3 per carry] but not much else. Grier will have to help a new crop of receivers develop and hope a revamped offensive line that once again features 6' 5", 308-pound junior tackle Yodny Cajuste—he missed last season with a right ACL tear—can protect and open holes. Grier's not a runner, though. "He's a better pocket passer," says coach Dana Holgorsen. "He's tall. He can go through his reads, and he can make every throw."

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

50

The Mountaineers open with Virginia Tech [9/3] in Landover, Md., a critical test for the Big 12. But if WVU hopes to compete for the league title, it'll need to win at least two of three against Oklahoma State [10/28], at Kansas State [11/11] or at Oklahoma [11/25].



Washington State

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE



Preparing for that Air Raid offense is hard because you have to be ready for tempo, multiple formations, crossing routes. Defenses can't substitute. The scheme isn't over-complicated, but they give different

looks. If they have a good quarterback, which they do this year [6' 4", 225-pound senior LUKE FALK], and if they have receivers, which they do [led by junior Tavares Martin Jr., who had 64 catches in 2016] they're tough to stop. They were good on the line last year too, which allowed them to run it a little more. The left guard, [6' 8", 370-pound senior All-American] Cody O'Connell, is a player, and right tackle Cole Madison [a 6' 5", 315-pound senior] does a good job too.

Since Alex Grinch took over as defensive coordinator [in 2015], they've done a good job of giving different looks with lots of movement in their front seven and lots of different coverages. They keep you guessing. They're very aggressive in stopping the run, which is why they create negative plays and force a lot of turnovers [47 in two years]. Most of their front seven is back, but they need a pass rusher or two to emerge to make up for the secondary, which isn't strong. Because they're multiple, the offense is guessing, and that causes quarterbacks to make mistakes. The trade-off is that sometimes you can get caught in the wrong defense. That's how big plays happen.

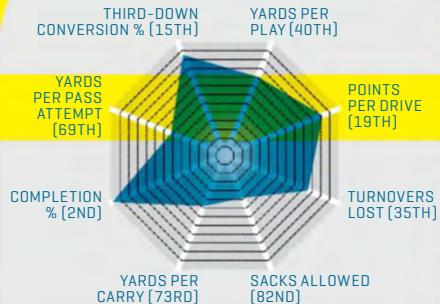


THE PLAYER TO KNOW

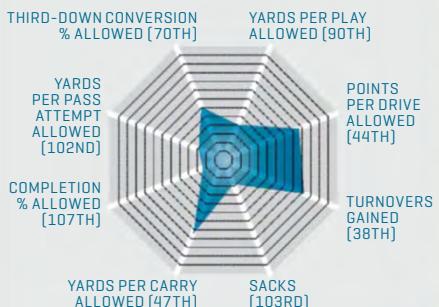
Last year, as a freshman, running back JAMES WILLIAMS led the Cougars in carries [102] and yards [584] and tied for fourth on the team with 48 receptions. As the top man in the three-way platoon with Jamal Morrow and Gerard Wicks, James helped Washington State improve by nearly a yard per carry in 2016, rising from 3.60 to 4.31.

That's a rare feat for pass-happy Mike Leach and his Air Raid-based attack, and the balance that ground game provided contributed to the Cougars' 8-5 season. Continuing that proficiency in 2017, while also providing a receiving outlet, will be crucial to quarterback Luke Falk's success, to say nothing of the team's.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



SEAN M. HAFFEY/GETTY IMAGES (FALK); COURTESY OF WASHINGTON STATE ATHLETICS (WILLIAMS)

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING **44**

To sniff the playoff, the Cougars will have to at least split matchups with USC [9/29] at home and at Washington [11/25], then win the Pac-12 title game. Before that they'll face trips to Oregon [10/7] and Utah [11/11] and host Stanford [11/4].

Texas



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

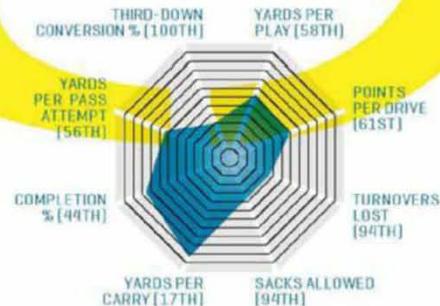
Tom Herman inherits some really talented receivers. During warmups, it's like, Look at those guys! Collin Johnson [a 6' 6", 215-pound sophomore] is the biggest, and he really started to come on last year. He

could be special. Their running backs are big, and they can make you miss. Their O-line improved as last season wore on. You could see them working together, which hadn't always been the case. [Junior] Connor Williams [6' 6", 315 pounds] is the best left tackle we saw. He's athletic, has the wingspan, and he's nasty. [Sophomore QB Shane] Buechele was green and had a lot of pressure. He didn't look the same after he took some big hits early on. I don't think he has a great arm, but he can throw the quick stuff and take some shots.

Todd Orlando's D at Houston was good at getting pressure. He will blitz from all angles and cut off any easy stuff on the outside. A lot of people hype [6' 3", 240-pound junior linebacker] Malik Jefferson and he can run, but we didn't think he was that good. He doesn't play physical. [Sophomore DE] MALCOLM ROACH [6' 3", 270 pounds] is better. He's a load, but he moves well. [Junior tackle] Charles Omenihu [6' 7", 270] looks like what Texas should have up front. Safety Jason Hall [a 6' 3", 220-pound senior] is a long kid and can cover slots. He was key because the corners are inconsistent.



OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Sophomore quarterback SHANE BUECHELE's season totals—2,958 yards passing, 60.4% completions, 21 touchdowns, 11 interceptions—are eye-catching for a true freshman in a Power 5 league, but the slender 6' 1" 185-pounder seemed to run out of gas late in the year. He threw two TDs against five picks in the Longhorns' last three games, all losses, though an injured right thumb and a broken rib certainly didn't help. New coach Tom Herman has been impressed by Buechele's accuracy and believes he's a good enough runner to keep defenses honest. Still, Herman thinks the signal-caller needs to develop into a more vocal leader, especially since Texas has only one senior projected to start on offense.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING: 58

Texas is probably a year away from making a run at the Big 12 title. It first hosts Maryland [9/2] before visiting USC [9/16]. [Tom Herman is 6-0 against Top 25 opponents.] In conference the Horns have a nasty back-to-back: Oklahoma [10/14] and a visit from Oklahoma State [10/21].

Virginia Tech



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

They're really well coached on defense. Coordinator Bud [Foster] runs a unique scheme. They'll do some Cover 2 inverted stuff, and they love to load the box. They'll choke out the run game and force you

to win on the perimeter. Their weakside 'backer [236-pound junior TREMAINE EDMUND] is a giant. He's 6' 5" and he can rally to the ball, but he can also match receivers. Their middle linebacker [6-foot, 233-pound senior Andrew Motuapuaka] is tough and experienced, but he can get exposed in space. They're always good in the secondary, and we think [6' 2", 197-pound senior corner] Brandon Facyson is their best DB.

On offense, they lost almost all of their production. It shocked me how much they use empty formations. They'll also do some unbalanced formations and come at you with a lot of motion. [Coach Justin] Fuente likes quarterback powers and quarterback counters. We don't know who's gonna win that job (sidebar), but he'll have to run. Travon McMillian [a 6-foot, 205-pound junior tailback] is a good player. He's solid for what they do. C.J. Carroll [a 5' 8", 167-pound junior] is a good slot receiver, and I think [6-foot, 199-pound senior] Cam Phillips will become one of the best receivers in the ACC. Their O-line is above average. Yosuah Nijman, their [6' 7", 300-pound junior] left tackle, is long and athletic.

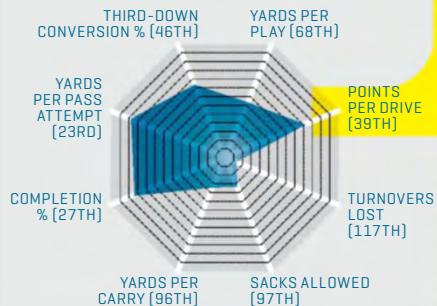
Tech will host Clemson [9/30], but otherwise the toughest tests are a visit from West Virginia [9/3] and a trip to Miami [11/4]. Beating the Canes is the key to winning the ACC Coastal, which could give them another date with Clemson. Daunting.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Although Virginia Tech's quarterback battle was unresolved going into camp, freshman **JOSH JACKSON** is the name to know. After a redshirt year learning coach Justin Fuente's scheme, Jackson should take over the Hokies' up-tempo offense at some point. At 6' 1", 211 pounds, Jackson doesn't fit the mold of Fuente's most recent quarterbacks—Jerod Evans stood 6' 3" and Paxton Lynch, now with the Broncos, is 6' 7"—but he has an impressive arm as well as good mobility, which is a key part of Fuente's attack. Considering the quarterbacks Fuente has groomed—Lynch and the Bengals' Andy Dalton, to name two—Jackson's ceiling appears high.

OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING

44

2017

Texas A&M



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

[Junior wide receiver] CHRISTIAN KIRK is a dynamic guy, so you have to do a lot to limit what he can do once he gets the football. When you punt to him, you try to get capable guys out there

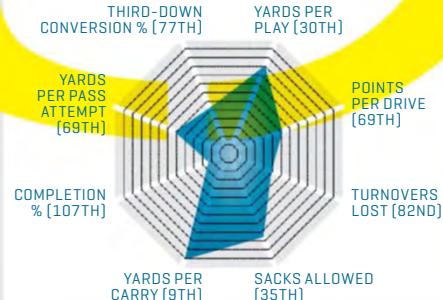
that can cover and keep him corralled, but everybody's trying that and it doesn't seem to be working. [Sophomore running back] Trayveon Williams is a big play waiting to happen. They're always talented on the offensive line. Any program that can keep putting out first-rounders at the offensive line position—that's hard to do.

[Senior] Armani Watts [5' 11", 205]—he's going to be one of the top safeties that we play. [Senior safety Donovan Wilson, 6' 1", 200] is a really good player and doesn't get as much recognition as he should for being one of the top DBs in the conference. He reminds you of the Honey Badger [former LSU star Tyrann Mathieu], who just plays hard, with good toughness. They lost a lot at defensive end and don't really have the same caliber of replacement. They do have [6' 1", 320-pound junior defensive tackle] Dajlon Mack. He's hard to block, hard to move off the point of attack and gets good penetration.

Talentwise, top-to-bottom, they can line up with anybody in the country and play ball.



OFFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



DEFENSIVE RANKINGS (1 TO 128)



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE RATING 49

The SEC West is an unforgiving beast, and A&M probably won't get through it without at least a couple of losses. The Aggies do host Alabama [10/7], but a late trip to LSU [11/25] is daunting, as is a tricky nonconference matchup at UCLA [9/3] to open the season.



THE PLAYER TO KNOW

Junior wide receiver Christian Kirk may be Texas A&M's most dangerous offensive weapon, but sophomore running back TRAYVEON WILLIAMS is its most valuable piece on that side of the ball. The four-star recruit had no issues transitioning from the Texas high school ranks to the SEC as a true freshman last season: He rushed for 1,057 yards on 6.78 yards per carry with eight touchdowns, while forcing opponents to account for the possibility of a routine handoff turning into a long TD. At 5' 9", 200 pounds, Williams is shifty and explosive. With questions at quarterback, the Aggies won't hesitate to let Williams do the heavy lifting on offense. A sophomore leap seems like a realistic possibility.

THOSE TICKETS



WON'T PAY FOR THEMSELVES.

Switch to GEICO and save money for the things you love.

Maybe it's home game package you get every year. Or those courtside seats next to the celebrities. Sports are what you love – and they don't come cheap. So switch to GEICO, because you could save 15% or more on car insurance. And that would help make the things you love that much easier to get.

GEICO[®]
Auto • Home • Rent • Cycle • Boat

geico.com | 1-800-947-AUTO (2886) | local office

Some discounts, coverages, payment plans and features are not available in all states or all GEICO companies. Homeowners and renters coverages are written through non-affiliated insurance companies and are secured through the GEICO Insurance Agency, Inc. Boat and PWC coverages are underwritten by GEICO Marine Insurance Company. Motorcycle and ATV coverages are underwritten by GEICO Indemnity Company. GEICO is a registered service mark of Government Employees Insurance Company, Washington, D.C. 20076; a Berkshire Hathaway Inc. subsidiary. © 2017 GEICO



Cheer and Trebling

→ BY STEVE RUSHIN

THAT SOUND YOU HEAR in the distance is a marching band drawing closer, ushering college football onto the stage with its fight songs and halftime shows and end zone alma maters. College football has inspired songwriters as diverse as Cole Porter (who wrote the Yale fight song), Luther Campbell (who wrote “It’s All About the U” for the Miami Hurricanes) and Brad Paisley, whose “Country Nation” goes, *We’re Mountaineers, Volunteers, we’re the Tide that Rolls, we’re Seminoles, we’re a herd of Longhorn steer...*

Music brackets our lives, from cradle to grave, lullaby to funeral dirge, and marks every worthwhile occasion in between: first kiss, graduation, wedding dance. Sports are no exception. You cannot hear “Sweet Georgia Brown” without thinking of the Harlem Globetrotters, and you cannot think of the Globetrotters without hearing “Sweet Georgia Brown.” Handel’s “Zadok the Priest” is far better known as the Champions League anthem, as surely as Rossini’s “William Tell Overture” was reduced—or, some of us might say, enlarged—to the theme from *The Lone Ranger*.

Just as the majority of Earthlings know Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” from Elmer Fudd’s bravura performance in Looney Tunes—“Kill da wabbit”—so has “O Fortuna,” by an obscure German composer named Carl Orff, gained immortality as the terrifying orchestral Armageddon used by the Steelers, Patriots, Redskins, Cavaliers and others as a pregame portent of imminent violence.

You can’t recite pi to the fifth digit, but chances are you can complete the following lyrics: “Hail to the _____. ” “Shake down the _____. ” “Meet the Mets, Meet the Mets, step right up and _____. ” That’s because music and sports ephemera occupy 93% of your hippocampus, and mine. There are the songs that became teams (“We Are Family” and the 1979 Pirates), songs that squatted in our childhood brains and could not be evicted (the *This Week in Baseball* theme), songs that play in our heads on ski hills (NBC’s Olympic fanfare) and touch-football fields (the *NFL on Fox* theme, accompanied by sentient robot).

Sports would be poorer without this music, and music would undeniably be poorer without sports, depriving us of “Where

Music
brackets
our lives,
from lullaby
to funeral
dirge, and
marks every
worthwhile
occasion
in between:
first kiss,
graduation,
wedding
dance.
**Sports
are no
exception.**

What's your
favorite
sports-
related song?
Join the
discussion
on Twitter
by using
#SIPPointAfter
and following
@SteveRushin

have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?” and “Jumpman, Jumpman, Jumpman, them boys up to something.”

Music now fills every pause in every stadium and arena, where even a momentary silence is considered awkward and unpleasant, as on a first date. This fear of quiet is not always a happy development. But on balance, ballpark organs and prerecorded walk-up music and the terrace songs sung in soccer stadiums worldwide are inseparable from the action itself. Stirring orchestral arrangements are an indispensable soundtrack to the slow-motion-spiral porn of NFL Films. Music pumps us up, brings us down, sends us home.

And so there are songs that endure almost exclusively thanks to sports: “Sweet Georgia Brown,” surely, but also “Sweet Caroline” and “You’ll Never Walk Alone.” How many newlyweds have entered their wedding reception to the original theme from *Monday Night Football*? (It can’t just be my brother-and sister-in-law.) How many millions have exited Yankee Stadium to Sinatra singing “New York, New York”? It’s a recessional hymn, the kind of thing you’d want to hear on your way out.

What do you want to hear on your way out? As your life passes before your eyes—a short highlight reel of sorts—“One Shining Moment” would do nicely. Before that song was commissioned, the tournament cake-topper was Kenny Loggins’s “This Is It,” which would also work as a musical headstone, and beats Peggy Lee singing “Is That All There Is?”

Play me out with the Theme from *The Jeffersons* (“Movin’ on Up”). The softly tinkling piano theme for CBS coverage of the Masters would also make nice walk-off music, and it’s the kind of thing that plays in a funeral home anyway. The bolder choice would be “Hells Bells” or “Enter Sandman,” songs made famous by baseball’s best closers and, in the latter, a musical cue—“Exit light, enter night”—that says, in more ways than one: Game over. □

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED [ISSN 0038-822X] is published weekly, with skipped issues in January, March, May, June, August, September, October and November with two skipped issues in February, April and July, by Time Inc. Principal Office: 225 Liberty Street, New York, NY 10281. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada addresses through the UPM process: GST #888381621RTO01. U.S. Subscriptions: \$65 for one year. SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. Your bank may provide updates to the card information we have on file. You may opt out of this service at any time. POSTMASTER: Send an UAA to CFS. See DMM 707.4.12.5. NON-POSTAL and MILITARY FACILITIES: send address corrections to Post Office Box 62120, Tampa, FL 33662-2120. MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2017 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED is a REGISTERED TRADEMARK of TIME INC. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS: For 24/7 service, please use our website: www.SI.com/customerservice You can also call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 62120, Tampa, FL 33662-2120.



PLANET FÚTBOL

COVERING THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SPORT



Sports Illustrated

SI.COM/PLANET-FUTBOL

ALL THE FLAVOR WITH A
NEW SMOOTH FINISH



WHEN YOU GOT **FLOW**,
YOU KNOW.